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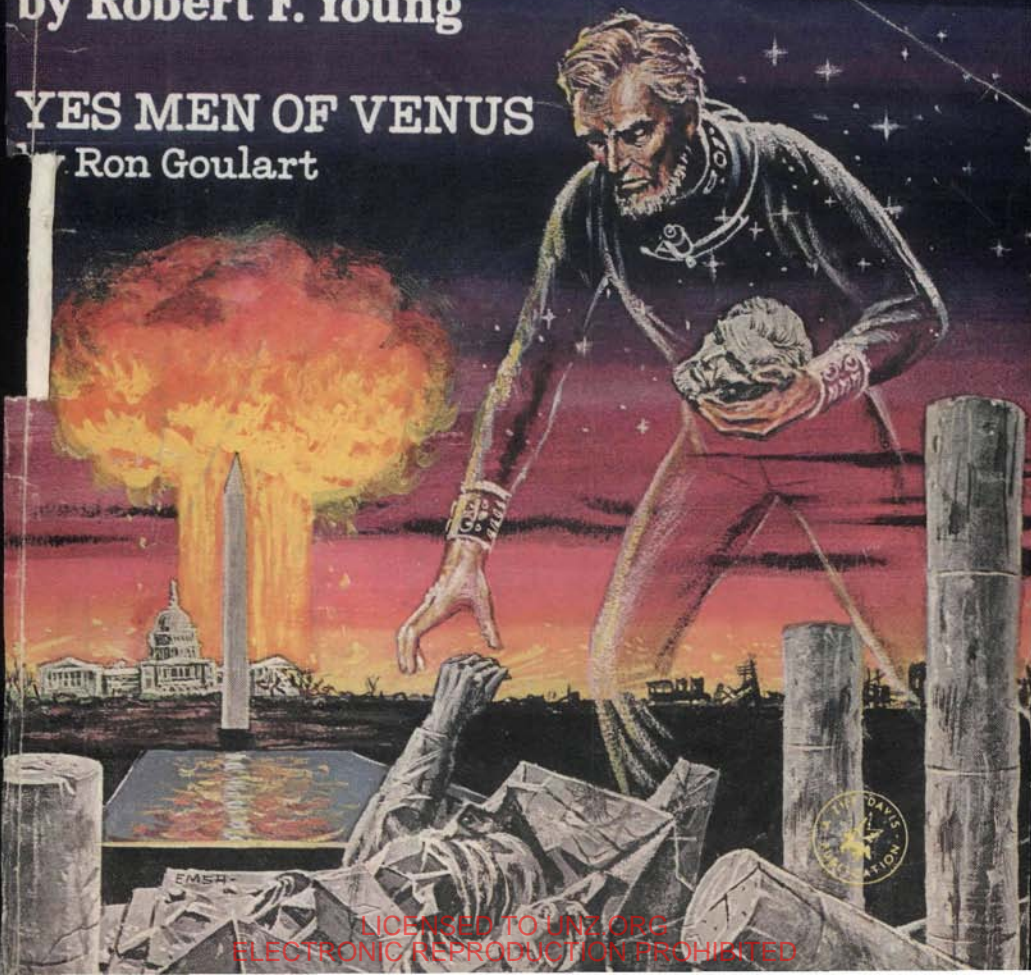
A Story You Will Never Forget:

REDEMPTION

by Robert F. Young

YES MEN OF VENUS

by Ron Goulart



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AMAZING STORIES, Fact and Science Fiction, Vol. 37, No. 7, July 1963, is published monthly by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company at 434 South Wabash Avenue, Chicago 5, Illinois. (Ziff-Davis also publishes—Popular Photography, Popular Electronics, Electronics World, HiFi/Stereo Review, Popular Boating, Car and Driver, Flying, Modern Bride, and Fantastic.) Subscription rates: One year United States and possessions \$4.00; Canada and Pan American Union Countries \$4.50; all other foreign countries \$5.00. Second Class postage paid at Chicago, Illinois and at additional mailing offices.

Amazing

Fact and Science Fiction Stories

July, 1963 Vol. 37, No. 7

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

"FIRST IN SCIENCE FICTION SINCE 1926"

NOVELETS

REDEMPTION	
By Robert F. Young	6
THE GAME	
By Neal Barrett, Jr.	52

SERIAL

THE PROGRAMMED PEOPLE	
By Jack Sharkey	82
(Conclusion)	

SHORT STORIES

THE FORMULA	
By Arthur Porges	46
THE YES MEN OF VENUS	
By Ron Goulart	73

FEATURES

... OR SO YOU SAY	4
EDITORIAL	5
COMING NEXT MONTH	120
THE SPECTROSCOPE	121

Cover: Emsh

Illustrating Redemption

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE: All subscription correspondence should be addressed to AMAZING STORIES, Circulation Department, 434 South Wabash Avenue, Chicago 5, Illinois. Please allow at least six weeks for change of address. Include your old address, as well as new—enclosing if possible an address label from a recent issue.

EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care; however publisher assumes no responsibility for return or safety of art work, photographs or manuscripts.

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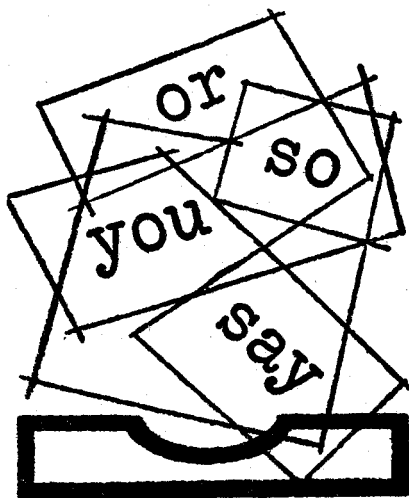
Midwestern and Circulation Office
434 South Wabash Avenue
Chicago 5, Illinois
WABash 2-4911

Western Office
9025 Wilshire Boulevard
Beverly Hills, California
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Dear Editor:

I have just finished reading three issues of *AMAZING* and I'd like you to know that I found them all good reading and generally a cut above most Science Fiction. However, I noticed that your magazine and for that matter most other American Science Fiction magazines, has a slight inferiority complex, which shows up most in the editorials and letter columns. As if Science Fiction is regarded as rubbish by most people, and that only a dedicated few ever buy it. Well, I'm not a fan, but I read lots of it and enjoy it too but I'm not wild about it. I think perhaps most people who buy books are like me.

There is no need to treat Science Fiction as a separate entity from literature generally. I'm

sure this is what many fanatics would like. Particularly those who regularly write long detailed and in my opinion childish letters to the magazine of their choice. I have often attempted to read letters only to be brought to a halt by abbreviations and phrases which read like gibberish. "Illo's, fanzines, mags, stf." and so on. And then there are the writers who use words such as 'Methinks'. I'm very doubtful about the maturity of these people, and I think that only letters understandable to the average reader should be published. This should also cover those interminable arguments between two readers which are often published. Imagine the disgust a potential reader feels when he looks at a letter department and finds that its an intimate affair between a few regular correspondents and the editor. With all the name dropping this entails I, for one, felt unwelcome somehow.

I intended to become a regular reader of *AMAZING* but under the present conditions in the letter column I don't think you'll hear from me again.

Patrick Kennedy
18 Water St.
Wallasey, Cheshire

● *Hail and farewell, then,
blithe reader, though, fan thou
never wert!*

(Continued on page 125)

EDITORIAL

SCIENCE-FICTION writers get around. Not long ago, glancing through our copy of *Science*, the weekly magazine of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, we chanced upon the name "Poul Anderson" signed to a letter to the editor. And what was Anderson doing? He was gently chiding some gentlemen who, noticing that recent explorations had justified two of Immanuel Velikovsky's wild predictions, had urged that Mr. V's "other conclusions be objectively re-examined."

Whereupon Mr. P., loyal science-fictioneer though he is, made the following acerbic comments (reprinted here with Mr. P.'s permission) on the connection between science and fiction:

"Fair's fair, of course, but why stop with Velikovsky? In describing Gulliver's third voyage, Swift remarked that the Laputans had discovered that Mars had two moons. Since this was written a century and a half before Hall found them telescopically, we ought to try out some of the other remarkable experiments and devices of Laputa. Conceivably we have here the po-

tential for a new scientific and technological revolution.

"A still more inexplicably neglected field exists in the files of *Amazing Stories* for the years between about 1945 and 1950. During those years a series of narratives appeared, by one Richard S. Shaver, which purported to be only slightly fictionalized accounts of the author's memories of a former existence in vanished Lemuria. According to Shaver, the original inhabitants of Earth were wise, benevolent, and immortal; they possessed a science far in advance of our own. But as the sun aged, its radiations became poisonous and produced debility and death. Most of the Lemurians abandoned Earth. Some remained, one branch becoming our own ancestors. The other branch degenerated completely, withdrew to a vast system of caverns, and became a misshapen, evil race of deros. Coming upon some devices left behind by the Lemurians which project mind-controlling rays, the deros have amused themselves ever since by causing all types of aberrant thought and behavior.

"Obviously Shaver had pre-

(continued on page 130)



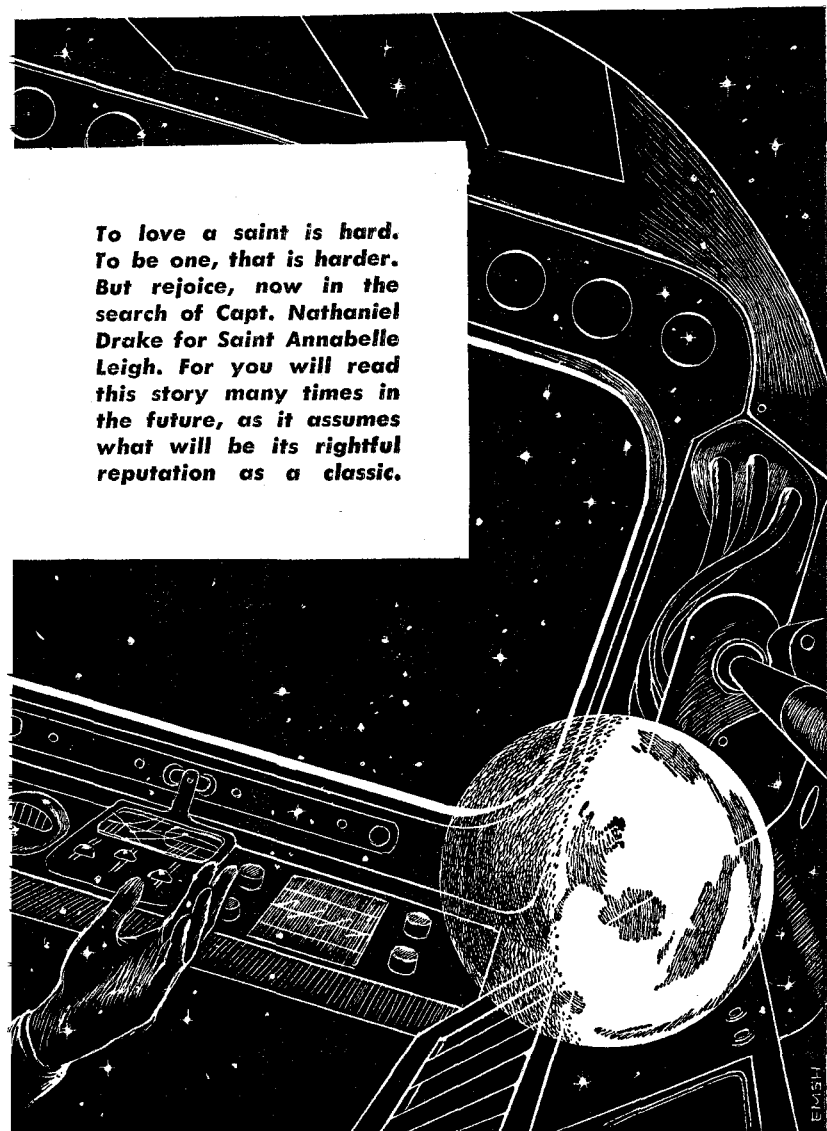
REDEMPTION

By **ROBERT F. YOUNG**

Illustrated by **EMSH**



**To love a saint is hard.
To be one, that is harder.
But rejoice, now in the
search of Capt. Nathaniel
Drake for Saint Annabelle
Leigh. For you will read
this story many times in
the future, as it assumes
what will be its rightful
reputation as a classic.**



THEY called him "The Jet-propelled Dutchman", but he was neither Dutch nor jet-propelled. He was neo-Terran. In common with all interplanetary spaceships of his day, his ship employed the Lamarre displacement-drive. His name was Nathaniel Drake.

Legend has it that whenever he put into port he searched for a certain woman in the hope of redeeming himself through love, but the makers of legends are prone to draw parallels where no true parallels exist. Nathaniel Drake searched for a certain woman—yes; but the woman for whom he searched was even more of a ghost than he was, and it was not love through which he hoped to redeem himself, but hate.

His story begins in a region of space off the orbital shores of Iago Iago, not long after the "Suez Canal" sprang its first "leak." In those days, the Sirian Satrapy was at the height of her industrial career. Her globular merchant ships busily plied her interplanetary seas, and her Suez Canal freighters left Way-out almost daily for the ravenous marts of Earth. Her planets prospered and her peoples dwelled in peace and plenty and her politicians lived high on the hog. Only one of her ten eco-sphere worlds knew not the blessings of civilization. This one—

Iago Iago—had been set aside for displaced indigenes in accordance with section 5, paragraph B-81, of the Interstellar Code, and was out of bounds to poet and pillager alike.

Nathaniel Drake was transporting a cargo of pastelsilk from Forget Me Not to Dior. Forget Me Not and Dior, as any schoolboy will tell you, are Sirius VIII and X respectively. Between their orbits lies the orbit of Sirius IX, or Iago Iago. Now at the time of Drake's run, these three planets were in conjunction, and consequently, in order to avoid the gravitic pull of Iago Iago, he had programmed the automatic pilot to swing the one-man ship into a wide detour. Although he did not know it at the time, this detour had already brought the *Fly by Night* into an area of space seldom "trodden by the foot of man."

When the "Suez Canal warp-process" proved impracticable for interplanetary runs, interplanetary spacemen accepted their lot once and for all and adopted three standard measures to combat solitude. In the order of their importance, these measures were (1) girlie realitapes, (2) girlie stereo-comics, and (3) hangoverless gin. Nathaniel Drake had nothing against watered-down voyeurism, but he believed in slaking a thirst, not in tantalizing it;

hence during most of his runs he concentrated on measure number three—i.e., hangoverless gin. The present run was no exception, and he was in the middle of his fifth fifth when the knock sounded on his cabin door.

HE was not a man who took fright easily, and he never panicked. He finished filling the glass he had just emptied, and set the bottle back down on the chart table. He could hear the faint creaking of the hull re-enforcing beams and the subdued murmuring of the grav generator in the power room below him. For a while, there were no other sounds. Then the knock came again.

Deliberately Drake got up, removed his ion gun from the rack above his bunk, and laid it on the table. He sat back down again. "Come in," he said.

The door opened, and a girl entered.

She was quite tall. Her hair was light-brown, and her brown eyes were set wide-apart in a thin, rather high-cheekboned face. They were strange eyes. They seemed to be looking both outward and inward at the same time. Atop her head sat a small kepi, its hue strictly in keeping with the blue-grayness of her coatblouse and skirt. Army of the Church of the Emancipation uniforms were noted for their

severity, and hers was no exception. In her case, however, the severity seemed to have been lost in the shuffle, and catching the sweep of her thighs as she moved into the room, Drake guessed why. She was stacked, this girl was—stacked so stunningly that the fact would have been self-evident even if she had been wearing a blanket.

The thoroughness of his scrutiny neither escaped nor disconcerted her. She did seem somewhat taken aback by his appearance, however. Small wonder: he needed a haircut, and the sideburns and chin whiskers that symbolized his captaincy had spread out into an unkempt beard that made him look fifty years of age instead of the thirty-two he actually was. "I—I imagine you're surprised to see me," she said.

Her voice was husky, but rich and full, and lent her words a resonance that words seldom get to know. Drake dug up another glass, poured it half full of gin, and offered it to her. She declined it, as he had known she would. "No thank you," she said.

He drank the gin himself, then sat back in his chair and waited. While waiting, he pondered the why and the whereby of her presence. The whereby gave him no trouble: the starboard storeroom provided sufficient space for a penurious passenger to

stow away, and venality was certainly a common enough ailment among port officials. The why, however, was a horse of a different dimension.

She tethered it herself. "I want you to put me down on Iago Iago," she said. "I'll pay you—pay you well. It would have been impractical for me to take a passenger ship—with so many witnesses, the pilot wouldn't have dared to land me. I—I gambled that a loner like yourself might. Iago Iago's in conjunction now, and you won't lose more than a few hours, and no one will ever know."

He was staring at her. "Iago Iago! Why should you want me to put you down in Iago Iago?"

"The Polysirians are expecting the resurrection of their supreme saint. I—I want to be on hand to witness it."

"Nonsense!" Drake said. "When you're dead, you're dead, and that goes for saints and sinners alike."

Golden flecks danced briefly in her brown eyes. "Does it, Mr. Drake? Then how do you explain the Potomac Peregrination?"

"I don't have to explain it because I don't believe in it. But to get back to specifics: even assuming that there *is* a resurrection about to take place on Iago Iago, there would be no way for the news to have reached you."

"We have ways. Call it an in-

terplanetary grapevine, if you like . . . The supreme saint prophesied that he would rise from the dead before the passing of a single year and appear in the heavens for all to see, and then descend among the people."

TO gain time for reflection, Drake dropped the subject and asked her name. "Annabelle," she said. "Saint Annabelle Leigh."

"And how old are you?"

"Twenty-three. Please put me down on Iago Iago, Mr. Drake."

"You said you were prepared to pay. How much?"

She turned her back on him, did something to her coatblouse, and swung around a moment later with a money belt in her hands. She held it out to him. "It contains two thousand credits. Count them, if you like."

He shook his head. "Put it back on. I wouldn't risk losing my pilot's license for ten times that amount."

"But there *isn't* any risk. I'm certainly not going to tell anyone that you violated the code."

He regarded her speculatively. "Credits aren't the only form of negotiable cash," he said.

She did not even blush. "I am prepared to pay in that kind of cash too."

He was dumbfounded. Sex was not forbidden to Church of the Emancipation girls, but usually

at the merest hint of it they ran away and hid somewhere. For a moment, remembering the sweep of her thighs when she had entered the room, he was tempted; but only for a moment. Recovering himself, he said, "I'm afraid that kind of cash won't suffice either. My pilot's license is my bread and butter, and I value my bread and butter highly." He stood up. "In my capacity as captain of this vessel I hereby place you under arrest and order you to return to your self-chosen quarters and to remain there for the duration of this voyage."

Disbelief darkened her wide-apart brown eyes. Then golden motes of anger came and chased the darkness away. She made a wild grab for the ion gun on the table. He thwarted her easily, seized her arm and, towering above her, escorted her out of the cabin and down the companionway to the starboard storeroom. The starboard storeroom adjoined the hull, and in common with all hull compartments, it was equipped with a lock instead of a door. After shoving Saint Annabelle Leigh inside, he adjusted the sealing mechanism so that the lock could be opened only from the outside, then he turned to go.

She ran forward and caught his arm. There was desperation in her brown eyes. "Please put me down on Iago Iago."

He freed his arm, stepped out into the corridor, and closed the lock behind him.

An hour later, his ship passed through a Lambda-Xi field.

At least Drake thought it was a Lambda-Xi field. Certainly its effect upon himself and the *Fly by Night* fitted the hypothetical description given in section 3, chapter 9 of *The Pilot's Handbook*—a prose-work which all spacemen were required to know by heart. The bulkheads "shimmered"; the artificial atmosphere took on a "haze-like aspect"; the deck "desolidified". As for Drake himself, he experienced a "painful prickling of nerve-ends and a slight vertigo". Then translucence—"the prelude to total disintegration" came to ship and master alike.

The handbook went on to state that in view of the fact that no one had ever passed through a Lambda-Xi field and survived, all knowledge pertaining to the preliminary effects of such a passage had had to be extrapolated. It then added reassuringly that since such fields were exceedingly rare, the danger they represented was virtually negligible. The handbook said nothing, however, about any handwriting on the wall. Handwriting there was, though, just the same. Standing in his ship, through the translucent bulkheads and hull of which

he could make out the stars, Drake read the single word:

DEATH.

And yet death did not come. Neither did total disintegration—if a distinction can be drawn. The *Fly by Night* went right on being translucent, and so did Nathaniel Drake.

He took a tentative step. He took another. The deck supported him, even though he could look down through it and through the decks beneath it and through the hull and dimly see the stars—yes, and in the nearer distance, the green globe of Iago Iago. He raised his hand, and found that he could see through his flesh too. He got a mirror and hung it on the wall and stared into his translucent face. He could see right through his reflected eyes to the reflected wall behind him. He could see right through his reflected cheeks and chin. Looking down at himself, he found that he could see through his body. Through his clothes. The translucence was such that the combination of clothes and flesh cancelled out nakedness; nevertheless, his spaceshoes and his spaceslacks and his thigh-length spacecoat were as unquestionably spectral as he was.

And yet he felt whole. His body had solidity. He lived and breathed. His ghostly ship still sped on its way to the distant shores of Dior. Maybe he was

dead, but he did not feel dead. I think, therefore I am . . .

He got out the log and set down the co-ordinates of the field. Abruptly he remembered his passenger, and ran down the companionway to the starboard storeroom. However, he did not throw open the lock. If he had he really would have been dead. Beyond the translucent bulkhead lay the utter airlessness of space. The storeroom was gone. So were all the other starboard compartments. So was the starboard hull.

So was Saint Annabelle Leigh.

NATHANIEL DRAKE sought out Madame Gin, only to find that she too was a ghost of her former self. Nevertheless, she had not lost her sixty-proof personality, and he consulted her at considerable length—throughout the rest of the voyage, in fact—beseeching her to close up the rather raw wound that had appeared in the side of his hitherto impregnable conscience. This, Madame Gin obstinately refused to do.

Between consultation he put his mind to work on a pair of pressing problems. The first problem had to do with his cargo. It had come through, every yard of it, but it had come through the way the ship itself had come through—with the exception, of course, of the starboard side,

which had apparently passed through the center of the field and been disintegrated altogether. It was ironic that a vessel so effective when it came to nullifying theremo-nuclear devices could be so utterly helpless against Lambda-Xi bombardment. Translucent to begin with, the pastelsilk was now virtually transparent and undoubtedly would be rejected by *Dernier Cri* Garments, the New Paris firm that had ordered it. Worse, he was bonded for it, and if the bonding company had to stand the entire loss, his ship would have to be forfeited, and his career as an independent merchant spaceman would be over.

The second problem had to do with his ghosthood. He did not have to ask himself how people would react to his appearance because he knew how he himself reacted to it whenever he looked into the mirror. And it was no good arguing that the mirror was a ghost of its former self too. He had merely to glance down at his hands to prove that the degree of emphasis was negligible.

Invariably his thoughts reverted to the wound in his conscience, whereupon he would rejoin Madame Gin at the chart table. Oh, he had a hundred arguments in his favor. He had not asked Saint Annabelle Leigh to stow away on his ship, had he?

He had not known that the ship was going to undergo Lambda-Xi bombardment, had he? He had not known that the starboard section was doomed, had he? But, while each question could be answered with a resounding "no", the cold cruel truth marched inexorably on: If he had acceded to Annabelle Leigh's request and put in for Iago Iago, she would still be alive, and by not acceding to her request and by locking her in the starboard storeroom, he had afforded Fate a very large assist.

"I wash my hands of it," he told Madame Gin. "I'm no more to blame for her death than Pilate was to blame for the death of Christ the First."

Madame Gin was silent.

"It's not my fault she was a saint," he said. "That's what makes it seem worse than it really is—her being a saint, I mean."

Madame Gin said nothing.

"If she hadn't been a saint, it wouldn't be half so bad," Drake went on. "If she'd been some bum peddling her posterior, it probably wouldn't bother me at all. Why the hell should I care just because she was a saint? It's crazy, I tell you. Hell, she wasn't even a good saint. Good saints don't go around making the kind of proposition she made me, no matter what the cause. Saint Annabelle Leigh isn't quite as noble as you might think."

"Wasn't," said Madame Gin.

"All right then, I killed her. I'll even admit it. All I'm trying to say is that her being a saint makes it worse."

"Murderer," said Madame Gin.

Nathaniel Drake seized her around the neck, whereupon she turned into an empty bottle. He smashed the bottle on the edge of the table, and spectral splinters flew in all directions. "I'm not a murderer!" he screamed. "I'm not, I'm not, I'm not"

THE first person to set eyes on "The Jet-propelled Dutchman" was the pilot of the New Paris sewage barge. He saw the ghost ship rather than its ghostly occupant, but this is of small consequence in view of the fact that the same looseness of terminology that marks the original legend also marks the second. He took one long look, then dumped his cargo into orbit posthaste and put back into port. The word spread rapidly, and when Nathaniel Drake put down some fifteen minutes later the New Paris streets and rooftops were jammed with jaded curiosity-seekers hopefully waiting to be scared out of their wits. They were not disappointed.

It is one thing to scare people who have no chestnuts in the fire that frightens them; it is quite another to scare people who have.

The *Fly by Night* had barely settled itself on its anti-grav jacks when a ground car came skimming across the spacestrip and drew up before the cargo dock. Out of the car stepped Thaddeus P. Terringer, president of *Dernier Cri* Garments, Dorrel Numan, vice president of *Dernier Cri* Garments, and the mayor of New Paris, who had his finger in the pie à la mode somewhere but exactly where not even the IRS troopers had been able to find out. Nathaniel Drake did not keep his visitors waiting, but donned his anti-grav belt, opened the ventral lock, and came drifting down to the dock. He had not shaved in two weeks, his unkempt hair hung over his forehead, and he was as translucent as tissue paper. They gaped.

The dock, rising as it did some five feet above the spacestrip, gave him an eminence of sorts, and the eminence, in turn, gave him confidence. "First time I ever rated a welcoming party," he said. "Where's the red carpet?"

Thaddeus P. Terringer was the first of the tongue-tied trio to recover his voice. He was a tall portly man, and he was attired as were his companions in the latest of *Dernier Cri* Garments' creations for the modern male: a pink tophat, a green, form-fitting suit of hand-twilled *thrip* fuzz, and high-heeled plastigator

shoes. "Drake," he said, "you're drunk."

"No I'm not—I'm disintegrated."

Terringer took a backward step. So did Dorrel Numan and the mayor. "You went through a Lambda-Xi field!" Numan exclaimed.

"That's about the size of it."

"Nonsense," Terringer said. "No one could survive Lambda-Xi bombardment."

"You call this survival?" Drake asked.

"The cargo," groaned the mayor. "What about the cargo?"

Drake answered him. "With a little luck, it might make good wrapping material for invisible bread. Put on your belt and go up and take a look."

By this time, the port master had arrived upon the scene. "I don't want anyone to board that ship till I've run a radiation check on it," he said. "Meanwhile Drake, take it up and park it on the five-hundred foot level. I don't know what happened to it and I don't know what happened to you, but I'm not taking any chances."

"Bring back a sample bolt," Terringer said. "We won't be contaminated if we look at it from a distance."

DRAKE nodded, adjusted his belt and guided himself up through the ventral lock. He ex-

tended the anti-grav jacks to five hundred feet, then, after getting a bolt of pastelsilk out of the hold, he drifted down to the dock again. He unrolled the bolt a little ways and held it up so that Terringer, Numan and the mayor, all of whom had retreated to a safer distance, could get a good look at it. It was as tenuous as mist, and owed what little visibility it still possessed to the exquisite blueness which the worms of Forget Me Not had imparted to it. Terringer groaned. So did Numan. So did the mayor. "And it's all like that?" Terringer asked.

Drake nodded. "Every last yard."

"Take it back to Forget Me Not," Terringer said.

Drake stared at him. "Why? They won't make it good."

"Of course they won't. But they may be able to induce their worms to reprocess it, or be able to salvage it in some other way. Meanwhile, we'll just have to order another shipment." He regarded Drake shrewdly. "You'd better hope they *can* salvage it. If they can't, your bonding company will be liable, and you know what that means." He glanced skyward to where the maimed and ghostly *Fly by Night* hovered like an awry balloon. "Although how a ship in that condition can be auctioned off is beyond me."

He turned, and together with Numan and the mayor re-entered the ground car and skimmed away. Drake felt suddenly, desperately sober. "Before you run a radiation check on my ship, run one on me," he told the port master. "I'm going into town and tie a good one on."

The port master grinned sympathetically. "Will do, Mr. Drake. I'll have the doc take a look at you too."

He was as good as his word, and both the *Fly by Night* and Drake checked out satisfactorily. Drake then went to see the port doctor, who gave him a complete physical and finally confessed in a rather awed voice that he could find nothing wrong with him. Afterward, Drake visited the Port Exchange Bank, turned in his translucent credit notes for a less spectral species, and withdrew his savings—a matter of some five hundred Rockefellows. However, he did not tie a good one on. He did not tie any kind of a one on. He had barely set foot outside the port when it all began. People looked at him and ran away, or, even worse, stared at him and followed him wherever he went. The first lush lair he went into emptied almost as soon as he stepped in the door. In the next, the bartender refused to serve him. He said hello to a pretty girl walking down the street, and she

fainted right before his eyes. He had gotten a haircut and a beard-trim by that time in one of the automatic barberbooths scattered strategically throughout the city, but apparently neither concession to propriety had made his appearance any the less ghastly. Finally, in desperation, he visited one of New Paris' leading physicists. The physicist ran a lengthy series of tests on him, stared at him for a long time, then asked, "Are you of Dutch descent by any chance?"

"No," Drake said, and left.

He bought ten fifths of gin and returned to his ship. It had already been recharged and re-provisioned. Repairing it, of course, had been out of the question. He thumbed his nose at the city as he soared spaceward. Soon he was beyond the sewage belt and free among the stars.

Forget Me Not

IN Nathaniel Drake's day, the worms of Forget Me Not were legion. All over Silk City you could hear the sad susurrus of their tiny bodies as they spun their colorful cocoons in the long low sheds thoughtfully provided for them by the good folk of Pastelsilks, Inc. Toward twilight, the whispering would fade away, then, with the timid twinkling of the first star, it would come to life again and build up and up

and up until the night would be one great vast whispering of worms at work—pink worms, green worms, blue worms, yellow worms, spinning silk such as had never been known before and will never be known again, for now the worms of Forget Me Not are dead.

Raise one more monument to the onward march of mankind. Place it beside the statue of the buffalo. You know where the statue of the buffalo stands. It stands right next to the statue of the blue whale.

Nathaniel Drake was well acquainted with the whispering. Forget Me Not was his birthplace, and his father had brought him to the fabled city-farm when Drake was a small boy. In his capacity as merchant spaceman, Drake had been there many times since, but it was the first time that stood out the most vividly in his memory. His father had been a grower of multi-pastels, a Forget Me Not plant genus whose mulberry-like leaves formed the worms' main diet, and had occasionally come to Silk City on business. On one of these occasions he had brought the boy Nathaniel with him and taken him through several of the long low sheds, hoping that the experience might help the boy to forget about his mother, who had died the spring before and about whom he had

been brooding ever since. There had been the sad susurrus of the worms working, and the glowing of colorful cocoons in the gloom, and in the processing sheds there had been the relentless turning of the automatic reels and the tiny corpses falling to the floor, one by one, and the boy Nathaniel, obsessed with thoughts of death, had wondered why more of the larvae were not spared the ignominy of the heat-treatment ovens and allowed to attain the apotheosis that was their birthright, not knowing then the senseless selfishness of mankind.

The man Nathaniel had not wondered. The man Nathaniel had not cared. The ghost of the man Nathaniel cared even less.

"Hello," said the ghost to a pretty girl as it passed her on the street.

The girl screamed, and ran away.

An old woman looked at him with horror in her eyes, then looked the other way. An IRS trooper stopped and stared.

Nathaniel Drake went on.

Behind him in the Silk City spaceport, a trio of reluctant techs from Pastelsilks, Inc. were conducting various tests upon his cargo in order to determine whether or not it could be salvaged. As their findings would have to be processed through the executive echelons of the com-

pany and would not be made known to him till later in the day, he had a few hours to kill.

He did not intend to kill them in lush lairs, however. He had a wound to take care of.

IT was the wound that had appeared in the side of his conscience. It had festered on the trip in from Dior, and now it was so painful that he could barely endure it. Madame Gin had only made it worse.

Conscience-wounds are different from physical wounds. In treating physical wounds, you attack the effect. In treating conscience-wounds, you attack the cause. Once the cause is eliminated, the wound automatically closes. This is rarely possible, but quite often the cause can be weakened, in which case the wound, while it will never completely close, will at least be less painful. In Nathaniel Drake's case, the cause was Saint Annabelle Leigh. If he could prove to himself that his suspicions were correct and that she had been something less than her sainthood would seem to indicate, a quantity of his pain might go away, and if he could discredit her sainthood altogether, his wound might close completely.

He proceeded directly to the local headquarters of the Army of the Church of the Emancipation. There, he inquired whether

a Saint Annabelle Leigh were assigned to any of the local chapels. A white-faced clerk replied in the affirmative, and referred him to the Saint Julia Ward Howe chapel on Redemption Street.

In common with all Church of the Emancipation chapels, the Saint Julia Ward Howe chapel was an unpretentious wooden building, long and narrow, with crossed Confederate and Union flags hanging above its entrance. Entering, Drake walked down a narrow aisle between two rows of backless benches and paused in front of a small pulpit upon which a crude lectern stood. Beyond the lectern there was a curtained doorway, and above this doorway two more crossed-flags hung. Presently the curtains parted, and a tall, pale man with a seamed and narrow face and gray and quiet eyes stepped onto the pulpit. "I am Saint Andrew," he began, then stopped in staring consternation.

"I'm Nathaniel Drake, the captain of the *Fly by Night*," Drake said. "I've come about Saint Annabelle Leigh."

Comprehension supplanted the consternation on Saint Andrew's lined face—comprehension and relief. "I am so glad you came, Mr. Drake. I am but just returned from the port, where I was informed that you had just left. I—I refrained from asking them about Saint Annabelle. Tell

me, is she all right? Did you put her down on Iago Iago? I have been half out of my mind ever since I heard what happened to you and your ship."

"I had bad news for you," Drake said. "Saint Annaabelle Leigh is dead."

THE whispering of the worms crept into the room. Saint Andrew's immaculate blue-gray uniform seemed suddenly several sizes too large for him. "Dead? Please tell me that's not true, Mr. Drake."

"I can't," Drake said. "But I can tell you how it happened." He did so briefly. "So you can see it wasn't my fault," he concluded. "I *couldn't* put her down on Iago Iago. It would have meant jeopardizing my pilot's license, and piloting a ship is all I know how to do. It isn't fair to ask a man to put his livelihood on the block—it isn't fair at all. She should have contacted me before she stowed away. You simply *can't* hold me responsible for what happened."

"Nor do I, Mr. Drake." Saint Andrew wiped away a tear that had run halfway down his cheek. "She did what she did against my advice," he went on presently. "The information she had received concerning a resurrection on Iago Iago was of dubious origin to say the least, and I was dead set against her stowing

away on board your ship in any event, but she was very set in her ways. None of which in the least alleviates the cruel fact of her death."

"She left much to be desired as a saint then?" Drake asked.

"On the contrary, she was one of the finest persons I have ever indoctrinated. One of the kindest and the gentlest. And in all my years of service in the Army of the Church of the Emancipation I have never seen a more dedicated and selfless soldier than she was. Her—her passing grieves me immeasurably, Mr. Drake."

Drake looked at the floor. He felt suddenly tired. "May I sit down, Saint Andrew?" he said.

"Please do."

He sank down on the nearest bench. "Was she a native of Forget Me Not?"

"No. She came from the vineyards of Azure—from a little province called *Campagne Piasible*." Saint Andrew sighed. "I remember vividly the first time I saw her. She was so pale and so thin. And her eyes—I have never seen torture in anyone's eyes that could compare to the torture I saw in hers. She walked in here one morning, much in the same way you yourself walked in, and she knelt down before the lectern and when I appeared, she said, 'I want to die.' I stepped down from the pulpit and raised her to her feet. 'No, child,' I said, 'you

do not want to die, you want to serve—else you would not have come here,’ and it was then that she lifted up her eyes and I saw the torture in them. In the two years that followed, much of the torture went away, but I knew somehow that all of it never would.” Saint Andrew paused. Then, “There was a quality about her which I cannot quite describe, Mr. Drake. It was in the way she walked. In the way she talked. Most of all, it manifested itself when she stood up here behind the lectern and spread the Word. Would you like to hear one of her sermons? I taped them—every one.”

“Why—why yes,” Drake said.

Saint Andrew turned, parted the curtains behind the lectern, and disappeared into the room beyond. He reappeared a few moments later, bearing an archaic tape-recorder which he placed upon the lectern. “I selected a tape at random,” he said, flicking the switch. “Listen.”

FOR a while there was no sound save the whispering of the worms, and then above the whispering came her rich, full voice. Sitting there in the dim chapel, Drake pictured her standing straight and tall behind the lectern, her stern, blue-gray uniform trying vainly to tone down the burgeoning of her breasts and the thrilling sweep of her

calves and thighs; her voice rising now in rich and stirring resonance and filling the room with unpremeditated beauty . . .” “I have chosen to speak to you this day of the Potomac Peregrination, of the walking of His ghost upon the land; of the rising of His stone figure from the ruins of the temple where it had sat in silent meditation for three score and seventeen years, and of its coming to life to walk down to the blood-red sea, there to fall asunder on the beach. They will tell you, No, this did not happen, that the broken statue was borne there by men who wished to immortalize Him, and they will supply you with pseudo-scientific data that will seem to prove that the Planet of Peace that hovered above His head and then came down and absorbed His ghost and bore it from the face of the earth was no more than a mass-figment in the minds of the beholders. Yes, they will tell you this, these cynical-minded people will, these fact-stuffed creatures who are incapable of believing that a man can become immortal, that stone can transcend stone; that this kindest of men was the strongest of men and the greatest of men and the most enduring of men, and walks like a giant in our midst even unto this day. Well let it be known by all present, and let it be bruited about, that I believe:

I believe that stone can take on life and that this great man *did* rise from the ruins of His desecrated temple to walk upon the land; like a towering giant He walked, a giant with the fires of righteousness burning in His eyes, and He did raise His voice against the bombs falling and He did wipe the incandescence from the hellish heavens with His terrible gaze, and the thunder of His tread did set the very earth to trembling as He walked down the Potomac to the sea, 'Lo, I have arisen,' He proclaimed. 'Lo, I walk again! Look at Me, ye peoples of the earth—I have come to emancipate you from your shackling fears, and I have summoned the Planet of Peace from out of the immensities of space and time to transport My ghost to the stars. Lo, I *force* peace upon you, ye peoples of the earth, and I command you to remember always this terrible day when you drove Kindness from your doorsteps and threw wide your portals to Perdition . . . ' Yes, He said these things, I swear unto you He said them as He walked down the Potomac to the sea beneath the brief bright bonfires of the bombs, the Planet of Peace shining high above His head, and if you cannot believe in the walking of His ghost upon the land and in His ascension to the stars, then you are as one dead, without hope,

REDEMPTION

without love, without pity, without kindness, without humanity, without humility, without sorrow, without pain, without happiness, and without life. Amen."

THE sad susurrus of the worms crept softly back into the room. With a start, Drake realized that he had bowed his head.

He raised it abruptly. Saint Andrew was regarding him with puzzled eyes. "Have you notified her family, Mr. Drake?"

"No," Drake said. "I mentioned the matter to no one."

"I'll radio them at once then, and tell them everything."

Saint Andrew rewound the tape, removed it from the recorder, and started to slip it into his pocket. "Wait," Drake said, getting to his feet.

Again, the puzzled regard. "Yes?"

"I'd like to buy it," Drake said. "I'll pay you whatever you think it's worth."

Saint Andrew stepped down from the pulpit and handed him the tape. "Please accept it as a gift. I'm sure she would have wanted you to have it." There was a pause. Then, "Are you a believer, Mr. Drake?"

Drake pocketed the tape. "No. Oh, I believe that the War of Nineteen Ninety-nine came to a halt on the very day it began all right. What I don't believe is

that the nuclei of the enemy war-heads were negated by the 'terrible gaze' of a second Christ. I've always gone along with the theory that they were negated by the bombardment of a Lambda Xi field that 'slipped its moorings' and wandered into the area—the same kind of a bombardment that nearly negated me."

"And a commendable theory it is too—but basically isn't it as dependent upon divine intervention as the Potomac Peregrination?"

"Not necessarily. Such concurrences seem providential merely because we try to interpret the macrocosm on a microcosmic scale. Well, I have to be on my way, Saint Andrew. The powers-that-be at Pastelsilks should have come to some decision concerning my transparent cargo by this time. Thank you for the tape, and for your trouble."

"Thank you for bringing me news of Saint Annabelle, Mr. Drake. Even though it was bad. Goodbye."

"Goodbye," Drake said, and left.

* * *

The offices of Pastelsilks, Inc. were as many as they were magnificent, and the building that houses them pre-empted almost an entire acre. The whispering of the worms was absent here, shut out by sound-proof con-

struction or devoured by the sterile humming of air-conditioning units. "Right this way, Mr. Drake," a frightened office girl said. "Mr. Pompton is waiting for you."

The vice president of Pastelsilks, Inc. gave a start when Drake entered, but Drake was accustomed by this time to the reactions his appearance gave rise to and no longer paid them any heed. "Good news or bad news, Mr. Pompton?" he said.

"Bad news, I'm afraid. Please sit down, Mr. Drake."

Drake did so. "But surely my cargo must be worth something."

"Not to us, it isn't. Nor to *Dernier Cri* Garments. And there's no way it can be salvaged. But you just might be able to dispose of it on one of the more backward planets, and to this end Pastelsilks, Incorporated is willing to defer demanding restitution from your bonding company for six months."

"Six months doesn't give me very much time to peddle a thousand bolts of invisible silk," Drake said.

"I consider it a very handsome gesture on our part. Of course if you're not interested, we can—"

"I'll give it a try," Drake said. "Which of the backward planets would you recommend?"

"Marie Elena, Dandelion, Little Sun, Dread—"

"Is Azure a possibility?"

"Why yes, Azure ought to provide a potential market. Its people are largely members of the peasantry, and it's conceivable that they might be attracted by bolts of colored mists and pastel nothingness."

"Good," Drake said, getting to his feet. "I'll be on my way then."

"One minute, Mr. Drake. Before you leave, I would like to make a suggestion with regard to your appearance."

Drake frowned. "I don't see what I can do about it."

"There are quite a number of things you can do about it. First of all, you can buy yourself some clothing that is *not* translucent. Secondly, you can buy yourself a pair of skin-tight gloves. Thirdly, you can buy yourself a flesh-colored rubber mask that will align itself to your features. You can, in other words, cease being an apparition in the eyes of everyone you meet, and become a perfectly presentable silk salesman."

Drake shifted his weight from one foot to the other. "I'm afraid I can't do any of those things," he said.

"You can't? In the name of all that's wholesale, why not?"

The word "penance" came into Drake's mind, but he ignored it. "I don't know," he said. He turned to go.

"One more minute please, Mr. Drake. Will you enlighten me on a little matter before you leave?"

"All right."

Mr. Pompton cleared his throat. "Are you of Dutch descent by any chance?"

"No," Drake said, and left.

Azure

THE best way to build a mental picture of Azure is to begin with a bunch of grapes. The bunch of grapes is cobalt-blue in hue and it is part of a cobalt-blue cluster of similar bunches. The cluster hangs upon a vine which is bursting with heart-shaped leaves, and the vine is one of many similar vines that form a verdant row, in turn, is one of many similar rows that form a verdant vineyard. You see them now, do you not?—these lovely vineyards rolling away, and the white, red-roofed houses in between?—the intervals of green and growing fields in the blue swaths of rivers and the sparkling zigzags of little streams?—the blue eyes of little lakes looking up into the warm blue sky where big Sirius blazes and little Sirius beams? Now, picture people working in the fields and in the vineyards; picture trees, and children playing underneath them; picture housewives coming out back doors and shaking homemade rugs that look like little rainbows; picture toy-like trains

humming over anti-grav beds from town to town, from city to city, tying in the entire enchanting scheme of things with the spaceport at *Vin Bleu*. Finally, picture a narrow road winding among the vineyards, and a man walking along it. A man? No, not a man—a ghost. A tall gaunt ghost in spectral space-clothes. A ghost named Nathaniel Drake.

He had come many miles by train and he had visited many towns along the way and talked with many merchants, and each time he had unfolded the sample of pastelsilk he carried and held it up for inspection, and each time the word had been no. In the town he had just left, the word had been no too, and he knew by now that wherever he went on Azure the word would be no also, but right now he did not care. Right now he was about to carry out the ulterior purpose of his visit, and the ulterior purpose of his visit had nothing to do with the selling of silk.

He could see the house already. It sat well back from the road. In it, she had grown up. Along this very road, she had walked to school. Between these verdant vineyards. Beneath this benign blue sky. Sometimes during those green years she must have sinned.

Like all its neighbors, the house was white, its roof red-

tilled. In the middle of its front yard grew a Tree of Love, and the tree was in blossom. Soon now, the blossoms would be falling, for autumn was on hand. Already the time for the harvesting of the grapes had come. Had she picked in these very vineyards? he wondered. Clad in colorful clothing, had she walked along these growing banks of green and heaped baskets with brilliant blue? And had she come home evenings to this little white house and drenched her face with cool water from that archaic well over there, and then gone inside and broken bread? And afterward had she come outside and waited in the deepening darkness for her lover to appear? Nathaniel Drake's pulse-beat quickened as he turned into the path that led across the lawn to the small front porch. No matter what Saint Andrew had said, Saint Annabelle Leigh could not possibly have been all saint.

A GIRL in a yellow maternity dress answered the door. She had hyacinth hair, blue eyes and delicate features. She gasped when she saw Drake, and stepped back. "I've come about Annabelle Leigh," he said quickly. "Did Saint Andrew radio you about what happened? He said he would. I'm Nathaniel Drake."

The girl's fright departed as

quickly as it had come. "Yes, he did. Please come in, Mr. Drake. I'm Penelope Leigh—Annabelle's sister-in-law."

The room into which he stepped was both pleasant and provincial. A long wooden table stood before a big stone fireplace. There were cushioned chairs and benches, and upon the floor lay a homemade hook-rug that embodied all the colors of the spectrum. A big painting of the Potomac Peregrination hung above the mantel. The marble figure of the Emancipator had been huge to begin with, but over the centuries the minds of men had magnified it into a colossus. Artists were prone to reflect the popular conception, and the artist who had painted the present picture was no exception. In juxtaposition to the towering figure that strode along its banks, the Potomac was little more than a pale trickle; houses were matchboxes, and trees, blades of grass. Stars swirled around the gaunt gray face, and some of the stars were glowing Komets and Golems and T-4A's re-entering the atmosphere, and some of them were interceptors blazing spaceward. The sea showed blood-red in the distance, and in the background, the broken columns of the fallen Memorial were illuminated by the hellish radiance of the funeral pyre of Washington, D.C. High above the ghastly ter-

rain hovered the pale globe of the Planet of Peace.

"Please sit down, Mr. Drake," Penelope said. "Annabelle's mother and father are in the vineyard, but they will be home soon."

Drake chose one of the cushioned chairs. "Do they hate me?" he asked.

"Of course they don't hate you, Mr. Drake. And neither do I."

"I could have averted her death, you know," Drake said. "If I'd put her down on Iago Iago as she asked me to, she would still be alive today. But I valued my pilot's license too highly. I thought too much of my daily bread."

Penelope had sat down in a cushioned chair that faced his own. Now she leaned forward, her blue eyes full upon him. "There's no need for you to justify your action to me, Mr. Drake. My husband is a Suez Canal tech, and he can't pursue his profession without a license either. He worked very hard to get it, and he wouldn't dream of jeopardizing it. Neither would I."

"That would be Annabelle's brother, wouldn't it. Is he here now?"

"No. He's on Wayout, working on the 'leak'. I say 'working on it', but actually they haven't found it yet. All they know is that it's on the Wayout end of

the warp. It's really quite a serious situation, Mr. Drake—much more serious than the officials let on. Warp seepages are something new, and very little is known about them, and Ralph says that this one could very well throw the continuum into a state of imbalance if it isn't checked in time."

Drake hadn't come all the way to *Campagne Paisible* to talk about warp seepages. "How well did you know your sister-in-law, Miss Leigh?" he asked.

"I thought I knew her very well. We grew up together, went to school together, and were the very best of friends. I *should* have known her very well."

"Tell me about her," Drake said.

SHE wasn't at all an outward person, and yet everyone liked her. She was an excellent student—excelled in everything except Ancient Lit. She never said much, but when she did say something, you listened. There was something about her voice . . ."

"I know," Drake said.

"As I said, I *should* have known her very well, but apparently I didn't. Apparently no one else did either. We were utterly astonished when she ran away—especially Estevan Foursons."

"Estevan Foursons?"

"He's a Polysirian—he lives

on the next farm. He and Annabelle were to be married. And then, as I said, she ran away. None of us heard from her for a whole year, and Estevan never heard from her at all. Leaving him without a word wasn't at all in keeping with the way she was. She was a kind and gentle person. I don't believe he's gotten over it to this day, although he did get married several months ago. I think, though, that what astonished us even more than her running away was the news that she was studying for the sainthood. She was never in the least religious, or, if she was, she kept it a deep dark secret."

"How old was she when she left?" Drake asked.

"Almost twenty. We had a picnic the day before. Ralph and I, she and Estevan. If anything was troubling her, she certainly gave no sign of it. We had a stereo-camera, and we took pictures. She asked me to take one of her standing on a hill, and I did. It's a lovely picture—would you like to see it?"

Without waiting for his answer, she got up and left the room. A moment later she returned carrying a small stereo-snapshot. She handed it to him. The hill was a high one, and Annabelle was outlined sharply against a vivid azure backdrop. She was wearing a red dress that barely reached her knees and

which let the superb turn of her calves and thighs come through without restraint. Her waist was narrow, and the width of her hips was in perfect harmony with the width of her shoulders—details which her Church of the Emancipation uniform had suppressed. Spring sunlight had bleached her hair to a tawny yellow and had turned her skin golden. At her feet, vineyards showed, and the vineyards were in blossom, and it was as though she too were a part of the forthcoming harvest, ripening under the warm sun and waiting to be savored.

There was a knot of pain in Drake's throat. He raised his eyes to Penelope's. Why did you have to show me this? he asked in silent desperation. Aloud, he said, "May I have it?"

The surprise that showed upon her face tinged her voice. "Why—why yes, I suppose so. I have the negative and can get another made. . . . Did you know her very well, Mr. Drake?"

He slipped the stereosnapshot into the inside breast-pocket of his longcoat, where it made a dark rectangle over his heart. "No," he said. "I did not know her at all."

TOWARD twilight, Annabelle's parents came in from the vineyard. The mother, buxom of build and rosy of cheek,

was attractive in her own right, but she was a far cry from her daughter. In order to see Annabelle, you had to look into the father's sensitive face. You could glimpse her in the line of cheek and chin, and in the high, wide forehead. You could see her vividly in the deep brown eyes. Drake looked away.

He was invited to share the evening meal, and he accepted. However, he knew that he would not find what he was searching for here, that if there had been another side of Annabelle she had kept it hidden from her family. Estevan Foursons was the logical person to whom to take his inquiries, and after the meal, Drake thanked the Leighs for their hospitality, said good by, and set off down the road.

Estevan Foursons lived in a house very much like the Leighs'. Vineyards grew behind it, vineyards grew on either side of it, and across the road, more vineyards grew. The sweet smell of grapes ripening on the vine was almost cloying. Drake climbed the steps of the front porch, stood in the artificial light streaming through the window in the door, and knocked. A tall young man wearing pastel slacks and a red-plaid peasant blouse came down the hall. He had dark-brown hair, gray eyes, and rather full lips. Only the mahogany cast of his skin betrayed his ra-

cial origin—that, and his unruffled calm when he opened the door and saw Drake. “What do you want?” he asked.

“Estevan Foursons?”

The young man nodded.

“I’d like to talk to you about Annabelle Leigh,” Drake went on. “It was on my ship that she—”

“I know,” Estevan interrupted. “Penelope told me. Nathaniel Drake, is it not?”

“Yes. I—”

“Why are you interested in a dead woman?”

For a moment, Drake was disconcerted. Then, “I—I feel responsible for her death in a way.”

“And you think that knowing more about her will make you feel less responsible?”

“It might. Will you tell me about her?”

Estevan sighed. “I sometimes wonder if I really knew her myself. But come, I will tell you what I thought I knew. We will walk down the road—this is not for my wife’s ears.”

Beneath the stars, Drake said, “I talked with the saint who indoctrinated her. He thought very highly of her.”

“He could hardly have thought otherwise.”

Estevan turned off the road and started walking between two starlit rows of grapevines. Disappointed, Drake followed. Had Annabelle Leigh never done

anything wrong? It would seem that she had not.

For some time the two men walked in silence, then Estevan said, “I wanted you to see this place. She used to come here often.”

They had emerged from the vineyard and were climbing a small slope. At the top of it, Estevan paused, and Drake paused beside him. At their feet, the ground fell gradually away to the wooded shore of a small lake. “She used to swim there naked in the starlight,” Estevan said. “Often I came here to watch her, but I never let on that I knew. Come.”

Heartened, Drake followed the Polysirian down the slope and through the trees to the water’s edge. Drake knelt, and felt the water. It was ice-cold. A granite outcropping caught his eye. Nature had so shaped it that it brought to mind a stone bench, and approaching it more closely, he saw that someone had sculptured it into an even greater semblance. “I did that,” Estevan said from behind him. “Shall we sit down?”

SEATED, Drake said, “I find it difficult to picture her here. I suppose that’s because I associate saints with cold corridors and cramped little rooms. There’s something pagan about this place.”

Estevan did not seem to hear him. "We would bring our lunch here from the vineyards sometimes," he said. "We would sit here on this bench and eat and talk. We were very much in love—at least everybody said we were. Certainly, I was. Her, I don't know."

"But she must have loved you. You were going to be married, weren't you?"

"Yes, we were going to be married." Estevan was silent for a while; then, "But I don't think she loved me. I think she was afraid to love me. Afraid to love anyone. Once, it hurt me even to think like this. Now, it is all past. I am married now, and I love my wife. Annabelle Leigh is a part of yesterday, and yesterday is gone. I can think now of the moments we spent together, and the moments no longer bring pain. I can think of us working together in the vineyards, tending the vines, and I can think of her standing in the sun at harvest time, her arms filled with blue clusters of grapes and the sunlight spilling goldenly down upon her. I can think of the afternoon we were rained out, and of how we ran through the rows of vines, the rain drenching us, and of the fire we built in the basket shed so that she could dry her hair. I can think of her leaning over the flames, her rain-dark hair slowly lightening to bronze,

and I can think of the raindrops disappearing one by one from her glowing face. I can think of how I seized her suddenly in my arms and kissed her, and of how she broke wildly free and ran out into the rain, and the rain pouring down around her as she ran . . . I did not even try to catch her, because I knew it would do no good, and I stood there by the fire, miserable and alone, till the rain stopped, and then went home. I thought she would be angry with me the next day, but she was not. She acted as though the rain had never been, as though my passion had never broken free. That night, I asked her to marry me. I could not believe it when she said yes. No, these moments give me no more pain, and I can recount them to you with complete calm. Annabelle, I think, was born without passion, and hence could not understand it in others. She tried to imitate the actions of normal people, but there is a limit to imitation, and when she discovered this limitation she ran away."

Drake frowned in the darkness. He thought of the tape Saint Andrew had given him, of the picture that he carried in his left breast-pocket. Try as he would, he could correlate neither of the two Annabelles with the new Annabelle who had stepped upon the stage. "Tell me," he said to Estevan, "when she ran

away, did you make any attempt to follow her?"

"I did not—no; but her people did. When a woman runs away because she is afraid of love, it is futile to run after her because when you catch up to her she will still be running." Estevan got to his feet. "I must be getting back—my wife will be wondering where I am. I have told you all I know."

HE set off through the trees. Bitterly disappointed, Drake followed. In trying to discredit the woman he wanted to hate, he had merely succeeded in vindicating her. The new Annabelle might be inconsistent with the other two, but she certainly was not inconsistent with saintliness, and as for the other two, for all their seeming disparity neither of them was inconsistent with saintliness either. It was a long step from the girl on the hill to the girl he had locked in the storeroom to die, but it was not an illogical step, and therefore it could be made. Two years was more than enough time to transform the surcharged fires of spring into the smoldering ones of fall—

Two years?

That was the length of time she had served under Saint Andrew. In the cabin of the *Fly by Night*, however, she had given her age as twenty-three.

The two men had reached the road. Suddenly excited, Drake turned to Estevan. "How old was she when she left?" he asked. "Exactly how old?"

"In two more months she would have been twenty."

"And when she left, did anybody check at the spaceport? Does anybody know positively that she went directly to Forget Me Not?"

"No. At the time it never occurred to anyone—not even the police—that she might have left Azure."

Then she could have gone anywhere, Drake thought. Aloud, he said, "Thank you for your trouble, Estevan. I'll be on my way."

* * *

He proceeded by anti-grav train to the spaceport at *Vin Bleu*, only to find that the records he desired access to were unavailable to unauthorized personnel. However, by distributing a quantity of his fast-dwindling capital (he had drawn out the second half of his bi-planetary nest egg on Forget Me Not), he managed to bring about a temporary suspension of the rule. Once handed the big departure log, he had no trouble finding the entry he wanted. It was over three years old, and read, *9 May, 3663: Annabelle Leigh via Transspacelines to Worldwellost, class C. Departure time: 1901 hours, GST.*

Hope throbbed through him. There were no Army of the Church of the Emancipation missions on Worldwellost. Worldwellost was a mecca for sinners, not saints.

In a matter of hours, Azure was a blue blur in the *Fly by Night's* rear viewplate.

On the chart table in his cabin, Madame Gin sat. Drake regarded her for some time. For all her refusal to help him in his time of need, he still found her presence indispensable. Why, then, did he not go to her at once and enrich his intellect with her fuzzy philosophies?

Presently he shrugged, and turned away. He propped the picture Penelope had given him against the base of the chart lamp; then he incorporated the tape Saint Andrew had given him into the automatic pilot and programmed a continual series of playbacks over the intercom system. He returned to the table and sat down. Ignoring Madame Gin, he concentrated on the girl on the hill—

"I have chosen to speak to you this day of the Potomac Peregrination, of the walking of His ghost upon the land; of the rising of His stone figure from the ruins of the temple where it had sat in silent meditation for three score and seventeen years, and of its coming to life to walk down to the blood-red sea . . ."

Worldwellost

IN common with Azure, Worldwellost is one of the inner planets of the vast Sirian system. However, it has little else in common with Azure, and in Nathaniel Drake's day it had even less.

Before the commercial apotheosis of its lustrous neighbor, Starbright, it had flourished as a vacation resort. Now, its once-luxurious hotels and pleasure domes had fallen into desuetude, and the broad beaches for which it had once been renowned were catchalls for debris, dead fish, and decaying algae. But Worldwellost was not dead—far from it. The rottenest of logs, once turned over, reveal life at its most intense, and the rotten log of Worldwellost was no exception.

Nathaniel Drake put down in the spaceport-city of Heavenly and set forth upon his iconoclastic quest. Annabelle Leigh's trail, however, ended almost as soon as it began. She had checked into the Halcyon Hotel one day, and checked out the next, leaving no forwarding address.

Undaunted, Drake returned to the port, distributed some more of his fast-dwindling capital, and obtained access to the departure log. He found the entry presently: 26 June, 3664: Annabelle Leigh via Transspacelines to

Forget Me Not, class A. Departure time: 0619 hours, GST.

Spacetime was synonymous with earth time and, while it was used in calculating all important time periods, such as a person's age, it seldom coincided with local calendars. Therefore, while the month and the year on Worldwellost might seem to indicate otherwise, Drake knew definitely that Annabelle Leigh had left the planet over two years ago, or approximately one year after she had arrived.

Judging from her change in travel-status, she had bettered herself financially during that period.

Had she spent the entire year in Heavenly? he wondered.

When all other attempts to obtain information about her failed, he had a photostat made of the stereosnapshot Penelope had given him, presented it to the missing persons department of Heavenly's largest 3V station, and engaged them to flash a daily circular to the effect that he, Nathaniel Drake, would pay the sum of fifty credits to anyone providing him with bona fide information concerning the girl in the picture. He then retired to his room at the Halcyon Hotel and waited for his visiphone to chime.

His visiphone didn't, but several days later, his door did. Opening it, he saw an old man

clad in filthy rags standing in the hall. The old man took one look at him, lost what little color he had, and turned and began to run. Drake seized his arm. "Forget about the way I look," he said. "One hundred of my credits makes a Rockefeller the same as anyone else's, and I'll pay cash if you've got the information I want."

Some of the old man's color came back. "I've got it, Mister—don't you worry about that." Reaching into the inside pocket of his filthy coat, he withdrew what at first appeared to be a large map folded many times over. He unfolded it with clumsy fingers, shook it out, and held it up for Drake to see. It was a stereo-poster of a girl, life-size and in color—the same girl who had had her picture taken on a hill on Azure—

Only this time she wasn't wearing a red dress. She was wearing a *cache-sexe*, and except for a pair of slippers, that was all she was wearing.

Drake could not move.

There was a legend at the bottom of the poster. It read:

*Mary Legs, now stripping at
King Tutankhamen's*

ABRUPTLY Drake came out of his state of shock. He tore the poster out of the old man's hands. "Where did you get it?" he demanded.

"I stole it. Ripped it off the King's billboard when nobody was looking. Carried it with me ever since."

"Did you ever see her . . . perform?"

"You bet I did! You never saw anything like it. She'd—"

"How long ago?"

"Two-three years. Big years. She's the one you want, ain't she? I knew it the minute I saw the picture on 3V. Sure, the name's different, I says to myself, but it's the same girl You should have seen her dance, Mister. As I say, she'd—"

"Where's King Tutankhamen's place?" Drake asked.

"In Storeyville. As I say, she'd—"

"Shut up," Drake said.

He counted out fifty credits and placed them in the old man's hand. The old man was regarding him intently. "You're the Jet-propelled Dutchman, ain't you."

"What if I am?"

"You don't look like a Dutchman. Are you?"

"No," Drake said, and re-entered the room and slammed the door.

* * *

The anti-grav trains of Worldwellost were as rundown as the towns and cities they connected. Drake rode all night and all the next morning. He didn't sleep a

wink throughout the whole trip, and when he got off the train at the Storeyville station he looked even more like a ghost than he had when he had got on.

His appearance provoked the usual quota of starts and stares. Ignoring them, he made his way to the main thoroughfare. Tall and gaunt and grim, he looked up and down the two rows of grimy façades, finally spotted the neon name he wanted, and started out. A knot of 'teen thieves formed behind him as he progressed down the street. "The Jet-propelled Dutchman," they cried jeeringly. "Look, the Jet-propelled Dutchman!"

He turned and glowered at them, and they ran away.

The exterior of King Tutankhamen's had a rundown mien, but it retained traces of an erstwhile elegance. Within, dimness prevailed, and Drake practically had to feel his way to the bar. Gradually, though, as the brightness of the afternoon street faded from his retina, he began to make out details. Rows of glasses; rows of bottles. Obscene paintings on the wall. A pale-faced customer or two. A bartender.

Outside in the street, the teen thieves had regrouped and had taken up their jeering chant again. "The Jet-propelled Dutchman, the Jet-propelled Dutchman!" The bartender came over

to where Drake was standing. He was fat, his skin was the color of nutmeg, and his hair was white. "Your—your pleasure, sir?" he said.

Eyes more perceptive now, Drake looked at the obscene paintings, wondering if she were the subject of any of them. She was not. He returned his gaze to the bartender. "Are you the owner?"

"King Tutankhamen at your service, sir. I am called 'the King'."

"Tell me about Annabelle Leigh."

"Annabelle Leigh? I know of no such person."

"Then tell me about Mary Legs."

The light that came into the King's eyes had a sublimating effect upon his face. "Mary Legs? Indeed, I can tell you about her. But tell *me* first, have you seen her lately? Tell me, is she all right?"

"She's dead," Drake said. "I killed her."

The King's fat face flattened slightly; fires flickered in his pale eyes. Then his face filled out again, and the fires faded away. "No," he said, "she may be dead, but you did not kill her. No one would kill Mary Legs. Killing Mary Legs would be like killing the sun and the stars and the sky, and even if a man could kill these things he would not do so,

and neither would he kill Mary Legs."

"I did not kill her on purpose," he introduced himself and told the King about the *Fly by Night's* encounter with the Lambda-Xi field, of how he had locked Saint Annabelle Leigh in the starboard storeroom to die. "If I had not been so selfish," he concluded, "she would still be alive today."

The King looked at him pityingly. "And now your hands are bloodied, and you must seek her ghost."

"Yes," said Drake. "Now I must seek her ghost—and destroy it."

The King shook his head. "You may seek it all you want, and you may even find it. But you will never destroy it, Nathaniel Drake. It will destroy you. Knowing this, I will help you find it. Come with me."

HE spoke a few words into an intercom at his elbow, then came around the bar and led the way down a spiral staircase into a subterranean room. Their entry brought vein-like ceiling lights into luminescence, and the room turned out to be a large hall. Cushioned chairs were arranged in rows on either side of a narrow ramp that protruded from a velvet-curtained stage, and to the right of the stage, a chromium piano stood.

"It is fitting that I tell you

about her here," King Tutankhamen said, "for this is where she danced. Come, we will take the best seats in the house."

Drake followed him down the aisle to the juncture of stage and ramp. The King seated him in the chair nearest the juncture and took the adjacent chair for himself. Leaning back, he said, "Now I will begin."

"It was over three galactic years ago when she first walked into my establishment. The tourists had not entirely forsaken Worldwelost in those days, and I was still enjoying prosperity. The bar was bright and bustling, but I saw her nevertheless the minute she stepped upon the premises. Thin, she was, and pale, and I thought at first that she was sick. When she sat down at the table by the door, I went immediately over to her side.

"'Wine, would you like?' I asked, knowing as I do the revivifying qualities of the grape. But she shook her head. 'No,' she said, 'I want work.' 'But what can you do?' I asked. 'I can take off my clothes,' she replied. 'Is there something else I need to know?' Looking at her more closely, I saw that indeed there was nothing else she needed to know; nevertheless, there is an art of sorts to bumps and grinds, and this I told her. 'You have other girls who can show me the rudiments,' she said. 'After that,

it will be up to me.' 'What is your name?' I asked then. 'Mary Legs,' she answered. 'It is not my real name, however, and you will have to pay me in cash.' I took one more look at her, and hired her on the spot.

"It developed that she had no aptitude for bumps and grinds. It also developed that she did not need to have. The first time she danced, only a dozen men sat here in this room and watched her. The second time she danced, two dozen sat here. The next time she danced, the room was packed, the bar was overflowing, and there was a line of men waiting in the street. Some girls dance simply by walking. She was one of them. She had what is called 'poetry of motion', but I think it was her legs, really, that most men came to see. I will let you judge for yourself. Incidentally, the piano which you will hear accompanying her was played by me."

King Tutankhamen leaned forward, slid aside a small panel just beneath the edge of the proscenium, and depressed several luminescent buttons. Instantly the lights went out, and the velvet curtains parted. A stereo-screen leaped into bright life, and a moment later, Mary Legs, nee Abbabelle Leigh, appeared upon it. So flawless was the illusion that it was as though she had stepped upon the stage.

Perfume reminiscent of the vineyards of Azure infiltrated the room. Drake found breathing difficult.

She was wearing a standard stripper's outfit that could be removed piece by piece. Hardly had she "appeared" upon the stage when the first piece fluttered forth and disappeared. Three more followed in swift succession. A fifth went just as she stepped, seemingly, out upon the ramp.

"She was always that way," the King whispered. "I told her that she should be coy, that she should tease, but she paid no attention. It was as though she couldn't get her clothes off fast enough."

Drake barely heard him.

MARY LEGS was moving down the ramp now, and now another garment drifted forth and winked out of sight. He saw her breasts. Chords sounded in the background. A progression of ninths and elevenths. Her face was glowing; her eyes were slightly turned up. Glazed.

Drake watched the final garment disappear into the mists of time. She was down to sandals and *cache-sexe* now. Her slow walk down the ramp continued.

There was poetry in the play of light upon her flesh, there was poetry in her every motion. The

flabby pectorals of beauty queens, she knew not. Here was firmness; depth. Her hair burned with the yellow fires of fall. An arpeggio like the tinkling of glass chimes leaped up and formed a brief invisible halo over her head. At the base of the ramp she went through a series of contemptuous bumps and grinds, then returned casually the way she had come. Now there was a subtle difference in her walk. Sweat broke out on Drake's face. His breath burned in his throat. Eyes turned up, she saw no one, then or now; knew no one, knew nothing but the moment. Her body writhed obscenely. Notes fell around her like cool rain. Suddenly Drake realized that she had not been flaunting her sex to the audience, but to the worlds.

She began a second series of bumps and grinds. While it lacked finess, it was obscene beyond belief, and yet, in another sense, it was somehow not obscene at all. There was something tantalizingly familiar about it, so tantalizingly familiar that he could have sworn that he had seen her dance before. And yet he knew perfectly well that he had not.

His mind ceased functioning, and he sat there helplessly, a prisoner of the moment. Presently she began a series of movements, a dance of sorts that had



REDEMPTION

37

in it the essence of every orgy known to mankind, and yet simultaneously possessed a quality that had nothing whatsoever to do with orgies, a quality that was somehow transcendent . . . and austere. She paused transiently just above him, and her legs were graceful pillars supporting the splendid temple of her body and her head was the rising sun, then she stepped back into the screen, the lights went on, and the curtain closed.

*I am a wall, and my breasts
like the towers thereof:*

*Then was I in his eyes as
one that found peace.*

IT was some time before either man spoke. Then Drake said, "I'd like to buy it."

"The realitape? Why—so you can destroy it?"

"No. How much do you want?"

"You must understand," said the King, "that it is very precious to me, that—"

"I know," Drake said. "How much?"

"Six hundred Rockefeller's."

The amount came perilously close to the figure to which Drake's capital had dwindled. Nevertheless, he did not haggle, but counted the hundred-credit notes out. The King removed the realitape from the proscenium projector, and the exchange was made. "You are getting a bargain, Mr. Drake," the King said.

"For a collector's item like that, I could get twice six hundred Rockefeller's."

"When did she leave here?" Drake asked.

"About a year after she arrived. A big year. I went to her room after one of her dances and found her gone. Her clothes, everything. . . . For all her willingness to exhibit herself, she was never really one of us. She would never permit any of us to get close to her in any sense of the word. There was something tragic about her. She said once that she could not bear children, but I do not think that this had very much to do with her unhappiness. She *was* unhappy, you know, although she was very careful never to let on." The King raised his eyes, and Drake was dumfounded to see tears in them. "You have told me that after she left Worldwelost she became a saint. Somehow this does not surprise me. There is an exceedingly thin line between good and evil. Most of us manage to walk this line with a greater or lesser degree of equilibrium, but I think Mary Legs could not walk it at all: with her, I think it had to be one side or the other. Evil, she found intolerable after a while, and she ran away, crossing the line to good. But good, she eventually found intolerable too, and she ran away again. She told you that she wished to be put

down on Iago Iago to witness a resurrection. This, I do not believe. Real or not, the resurrection was an excuse for her. I believe that she was searching for a way of life that would combine the two extremes of good and evil and that she hoped to find it among the primitive Polysirians. And I think that she also hoped to find a man who would understand her and accept her for what she was. Do you think I may be right, Nathaniel Drake?"

"I don't know," Drake said. Abruptly he stood up. "I'll be on my way now."

King Tutankhamen touched his arm. "The question which I am about to ask is an exceedingly delicate one, Nathaniel Drake. I hope you will not take offense?"

Drake sighed wearily. "Ask it then, and get it over with."

"By any chance, are you of Dutch descent?"

"No," Drake said, and left.

THREE of the six months which Pastelsilks, Inc. had given Drake to sell his cargo had now passed, and his cargo was undiminished by so much as a single bolt of blue. His capital, on the other hand, was virtually exhausted. Even *Der Fliegende Holländer* had never had it so bad.

Drake had not expected to be able to sell any of the pastelsilk on Worldwellost, nor, he realized

in retrospect, had he expected to be able to sell any of it on Azure. It was imperative, however, that he sell it somewhere and sell it soon, for, unredeemed or not, he still intended to go on living, and in order to go on living he needed a means by which to make his daily bread, and while a ghostship left much to be desired, it was better than no ship at all. He had known all along that there was one place in the Sirian Satrapy where the people were naive enough to barter worthwhile goods for "bolts of blue and pastel nothingness", and that place was Iago Iago. However, he had deferred going there for two reasons. The first reason had been his eagerness to discredit Saint Annabelle Leigh, and the second had been his fear that fencing the goods he procured on Iago Iago might get him into trouble with the authorities and lead to the loss of his pilot's license. But for all his seeming success in blackening the face of the woman he wanted to hate, he had failed so completely to evoke the desired emotion that he knew by now that the cause was hopeless; and in view of the fact that his pilot's license would be worthless if he lost his ship, the second objection was no longer valid. It had been in the books all along for him to go to Iago Iago.

He lifted up from Heavenly

and found the stars again, and the stars were good. Madame Gin, he left behind. After turning over the ship to the automatic pilot, he got out the realitape he had purchased from King Tutankhamen and fitted it into the girlie realitape projector. Presently Mary Legs stepped out of the past. He propped the stereosnapshot Penelope had given him against the base of the chart lamp, then he turned on the intercom. "I have chosen to speak to you this day of the Potomac Peregrination, of the walking of His ghost upon the land," said Saint Annabelle Leigh. Mary Legs cast her final garment into the mists of time and walked lewdly down the ramp. Perfume reminiscent of the vineyards of Azure permeated the room. Cancelling out the background music, Drake discovered that her dance blended with the words Saint Annabelle Leigh was uttering. No, not Saint Annabelle's words exactly, but the rhythm and the resonance of her voice. What the one was trying to express, the other was trying to express also. *Look at me*, they "said" in unison. *I am lonely and afraid, and full of love. Yes, yes!* cried the girl *on the hill. Full of love, full of love, full of love!* . . . And in the cabin, vineyards blossomed, flowers bloomed; there rose a blue-bright sun, and in its radiance

the boy and the girl walked, the boy Nathaniel and the girl Annabelle Leigh, and the wind blew and the grass sang and the trees put their heads together in rustling consultations . . . and all the while, the hull-beams creaked and the grav generator murmured, and the spectral *Fly by Night* sped on its way to Iago Iago.

It was fitting that a ghost should fall in love with a ghost.

Iago Iago

IAGO IAGO is like a massive ball of yarn left lying in the hall of the universe by some capricious cosmic cat. It is emerald in hue, and when it is viewed from a great distance its atmosphere lends it a soft and fuzzy effect. This effect diminishes as the distance decreases, finally ceases to be a factor, and the planet emerges as a bright green Christmas-tree ornament hanging upon the star-bedight spruce of space.

The Polysirians were expecting Nathaniel Drake. They had been expecting him for many months. "I will arise and come back to you, he had said. "I will appear in your sky, and come down to you, and you will know then that His ghost did truly walk, and that it did not walk in vain." Nathaniel Drake did not know that they were expecting him, however, nor did he know

that he had said these words.

He brought the *Fly by Night* down in a grassy meadow, parked it on extended anti-grav jacks, and drifted down to the ground. He heard the shouts then, and saw the Polysirians running toward him out of a nearby forest. He would have re-boarded his ship and closed the lock behind him, but the tenor of their shouts told him that he had nothing to fear, and he remained standing in the meadow, tall and gaunt and ghostly, waiting for them to come up.

They halted a dozen yards away and formed a colorful semicircle. They wore flowers in their hair, and their sarongs and lap-laps were made of pastelsilk. The pastelsilk was decades-old. Had another trader come down out of the heavens in times past and defiled this virgin ground?

Presently the semicircle parted, and an old woman stepped into the foreground. Drake saw instantly that she was not a Polysirian. Her Church of the Emancipation uniform stood out in jarring contrast to the colorful attire of the natives, but it was not one of the mass-produced uniforms worn by her compeers in the civilized sections of the satrapy. It had been spun and cut and sewn by hand, and in its very simplicity had attained a dignity that its civilized cousins could never know. Some-

how he got the impression that she was wearing it for the first time.

She began walking toward him through the meadow grass. There was something tantalizingly familiar about the way she moved; something nostalgic. The brim of her kepi kept her eyes in shadow, and he could not see into them. Her cheeks were sere and thin, yet strangely lovely. She stopped before him and looked up into his face with eyes into which he still could not see. "The people of Iago Iago welcome you back, Nathaniel Drake," she said.

The heavens seemed to shimmer; the terrain took on an unreal cast. The semicircle knelt and bowed its be-flowered heads. "I don't understand," he said.

"Come with me."

HE walked beside her over the meadow, the ranks of the people parting, and the people falling in behind; over the meadow and through the park-like forest and down the street of an idyllic village and up a gentle hill that swelled like a virgin's breast into the sky. The people began to sing, and the tune was a thrilling one, and the words were fine and noble.

On top of the hill lay a lonely grave. The old woman halted before it, and Drake halted beside her. Out of the corner of his eye

he saw a tear flash down her withered cheek. At the head of the grave there was a large stone marker. The marker was intended for two graves, and had been placed in such a way that when the second grave was dug the stone face would be centered behind both.

"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;" the Polysirians sang. *"He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored; HE hath loosed the fearful lightning of his terrible swift sword, His truth is marching on."*

Nathaniel Drake looked at the marker's stone face. One half of it was blank. On the other half—the half that overlooked the grave—the following letters had been inscribed:

SAINT NATHANIEL DRAKE

Draked knew the answer then, and knew what he must do—

What, in a sense, he had done already . . .

He turned to the old woman standing beside him. "When did I first come here?" he asked.

"Fifty-two years ago."

"And how old was I when I died?"

"You were eighty-three."

"Why did I become a saint?"

"You never told me, Nathaniel Drake."

Gently, he touched her cheek. She raised her eyes then, and this time he saw into them—saw

the years and the love and the laughter, the sorrow and the pain. "Were we happy together?" he asked.

"Yes, my darling—thanks to you."

He bent and kissed her upon the forehead. "Good by, Mary Legs," he said, and turned and walked down the hill.

"Glory, glory hallelujah," the Polysirians sang, as his ship rose up into the sky. *"Glory, glory, hallelujah. Glory, glory, hallelujah, his truth is marching on."*

TO what may a warp seepage be likened?

It may be likened to a leak in the roof of a twentieth-century dwelling. The roofs of twentieth-century dwellings were supported by rafters, and whenever a leak occurred, the water ran along these rafters and seeped through the ceiling in unexpected places. While the "rafters" of man-made spacewarps are of a far more complex nature than the rafters of such simple dwellings, the basic analogy still holds true: the spatio-temporal elements that escape from spacewarps such as the Suez Canal never emerge in the immediate vicinity of the rift.

Even in Nathaniel Drake's day, the Suez Canal techs knew this, but what they did not know was that such seepages do not

pose a threat to the continuum, but only to whoever or whatever comes into contact with their foci. Neither did the Suez Canal techs—or anyone else, for that matter—know that the effect of these foci varies in ratio to the directness of the contact, and that in the case of partial contact, the effect upon a human being or an object is seemingly similar to the hypothetical preliminary effect of a Lambda-Xi bombardment. Hence it is not surprising that no one, including Drake himself, had tumbled to the true cause of his “ghosthood”: i.e., *that he and the major part of his ship, in coming into partial contact with a focus, had been partially transmitted into the past.* Simultaneously, the rest of the ship—and Annabelle Leigh—had come into direct contact with the focus and had been totally transmitted into the past.

Here then was the situation when Drake left Iago Iago:

Part of himself and part of his ship and all of Saint Annabelle Leigh were suspended in a past moment whose temporal location he knew to be somewhere in the year 3614 but whose location, although he knew it to be within displacement-drive range of Iago Iago, he could only guess at, while the preponderance of himself and the preponderance of his ship hurtled to-

ward the region of space that was responsible for his “ghosthood” and whose co-ordinates he had jotted down in the *Fly by Night's* log over three months ago. In the light of the knowledge with which his visit to Iago Iago had endowed him, he quite naturally assumed that once he and the ship made direct contact with the force that had partially transmitted them, the rest of the transmission would automatically take place—as in a sense it already had. But what Drake did not know, and had no way of knowing, was that spatio-temporal inconsistencies must be balanced before they can be eliminated, and that before total transmission could be effected, his three months-plus sojourn in the future had to be compensated for by a corresponding sojourn in the past, the length of said sojourn to be in inverse ratio to the spatio-temporal distance he would be catapulted. Consequently he was shocked when, following the *Fly by Night's* coincidence with the focus, he emerged, not in the spatio-temporal moment he was prepared for, but in the war-torn skies of a planet of another era and another system.

At the instant of emergence, every warning light on the ship began blinking an angry red, and the scintillometric siren began wailing like an *enfant ter-*

rible. Drake's conditioned reflexes superseded his shock to the extent that he had the anti-fission field activated before the automatic pilot had finished processing the incoming sensoria. Although he did not know it at the time, the shield that the ship threw out cleansed nearly an entire hemisphere of radio-activity and engulfed half an ocean and a whole continent. All of which brings up another aspect of time that was undreamed of in Drake's day: Expansion.

NEANDERTHAL man stood knee-high to a twentieth-century grasshopper, and the woolly mammoth that he hunted was no longer than a twentieth-century cicada. The universe expands on a temporal as well as a spatial basis, and this expansion is cumulative. Over a period of half a century, the results are negligible, but when millenia are involved, the results are staggering. Look not to fossils to dispute this seeming paradox, for fossils are an integral part of the planets they are interred upon; and do not point with polemic fingers to such seemingly insuperable obstacles as mass, gravity, and bone tissue, for the cosmos is run on a co-operative basis, and all things both great and small co-operate. Nor are there any discrepancies in the normal order of events. A six-foot man of

a past generation is the equivalent of a six-foot man of a future generation: it is only when you lift them from their respective eras and place them side by side that the difference in relative size becomes manifest. Thus, in the eyes of the inhabitants of the planet he was about to descend upon, Nathaniel Drake would be a figure of heroic proportions, while his ship would loom in the heavens like a small moon—

Or a small planet . . .

Beneath him lay the ruins of a once-magnificent structure. Not far away from the ruins, a pale river ran, and across the river, a city burned brightly in the night. Nathaniel Drake knew where he was then—and when. Looking down upon the ruins, he had an inkling of his destiny.

What I do now, he thought, has already been done, and I cannot change it one iota. Therefore, what I do I am destined to do, and I am here to fulfill my destiny.

He still wore his anti-grav belt. He parked the *Fly by Night* on extended jacks, and drifted down to the ground.

Here, cherry trees grew, and the cherry trees were in blossom. Towering above the pink explosions, Nathaniel Drake knew his heroic proportions.

He approached the ruins he had seen from above. The noble

columns lay broken; the stately roof had fallen in. The walls, blasphemed not long ago by the hate-steeped scrawls of segregationists, were rivened. Was that a marble hand protruding over there?

A hand. A marble arm. A shattered white-marble leg. Drake knew his destiny then, and began to dig.

No one saw him, for men had become moles, and cowered in dark places. Above him in the sky, missiles struck the anti-fission shield and winked out like gutted glowworms. Interceptors blazed up, then blazed back down again, and died. The flames of the burning capital painted the Potomac blood-red.

He continued to dig.

A fallen column lay across the broken marble body. He rolled the column aside. The noble head lay broken on the floor. He picked it up with gentle hands and carried it out and laid it on the spring-damp ground. Piece by piece, he carried the broken statue out, and when he was sure that not a single fragment remained among the ruins, he brought his ship down and loaded the pieces into the hold. Lifting, he set forth for the sea.

SOME distance inland from the shores of Chesapeake Bay, he left the ship and drifted down to the bank of the river and began

walking along the river to the sea. Above him, the automatic pilot held the ship on the course.

He felt like a giant, Nathaniel Drake did, walking down the Potomac to the sea, and in this long-ago age a giant he was. But all the while he walked, he knew that compared to the giant he was impersonating, he was a pygmy two feet tall.

... and if you cannot believe in the walking of His ghost upon the land and in His ascension to the stars, then you are as one dead, without hope, without love, without pity, without kindness, without humanity, without humility, without sorrow, without pain, without happiness, and without life . . .

"Amen," said Nathaniel Drake.

He came to a village untouched by the destruction around it, and saw people crawling out of underground shelters. Looking down upon them, he proclaimed "Lo, I have arisen. Lo, I walk again! Look at Me, ye peoples of the earth—I have come to emancipate you from your shackling fears, and I have summoned the Planet of Peace from out of the immensities of space and time to transport My ghost to the stars. Lo, I force peace upon you, ye peoples of the earth, and I command you to remember always this terrible day when you drove
(Concluded on page 51)

**Did the old professor really
have the powers of psi?
If O. Henry had written sf,
he might have written . . .**

THE FORMULA

By ARTHUR PORGES

YOUR mistake, Larsen, if you don't mind my saying so, is in letting Corman force the card you pick, so to speak—to let *him* set all the important conditions of the experiment."

The clear, slightly nasal voice, so full of assurance, was unmistakable. It belonged to Ken Lambert, a brash PhD, still in his early twenties, and a highly promising astronomer.

Sitting in the next booth with my coffee, I heard Larsen's rumbling denial.

"What do you mean? I put him in a separate room, on the farther side of the room. I had him searched. How could I think of a crazy trick like that dog whistle, silent to a man's ears, he signalled with?"

"I know; I know; it was clever of old Corman. But the thing is, if he tries another hoax, you

must impose conditions *after* the bet is made—unexpected ones. Then he'll have to pay off without trying, or fail completely."

"He won't accept such a bet—why should he?"

"Because, clearly, he has an obsession about hoaxing you, and can't stop. He'll assume reasonable conditions, which he's already prepared for, and agree to the trial. Then you'll fix him for once."

I slipped quietly away. So Lambert was backing Nelson to catch Corman in his own trap. This would be worth watching. There was a conference due on Friday—the last of the year—which gave them four days to prepare. I debated mentally about warning Corman, but the negative won. It wouldn't be fair, and besides, Nelson deserved to get some of his own back if he

could. I didn't even pass the word along, for fear Corman would be tipped off by somebody else.

On Friday, after the business of the meeting was over, the socializing began, with most of the wives coming in to join their husbands. Larsen and Lambert parked themselves a few feet away from Corman, watching him with a kind of anticipatory relish, like cannibals studying the latest missionary and estimating his weight on the hoof.

For almost an hour, nothing much happened. As usual, the men were talking shop, while their women, none too happily, formed little groups of their own.

Then, at seven fifteen, Warren Guild came in, announcing cheerfully: "Pretty warm out this evening, for May."

"Close to eighty-one, right now," Corman squeaked, turning his head for a brief, provocative glance towards Larsen.

"Been out to check?" Guild inquired.

"Don't have to," was the reply. "It's a sort of ESP thing with me. I can always tell what the temperature is outside, even from this air-conditioned room."

I saw Lambert whisper something in Larsen's ear.

"Maybe the temperature is a simple linear function of the time," Larsen said coldly, "and

so you figure out the equation."

"Think so?" Corman seemed amused. "The fact is, Nils, that the graph of temperature as a function of the time is not everywhere differentiable. Sometimes the temperature stays the same for several minutes; occasionally it even reverses itself."

LARSEN hesitated. I could almost read his mind. Undoubtedly he was thinking that even if the relation was a complicated one, a man of Corman's ability might still have derived a good approximation formula for it. Lambert prompted him again.

"This is another one of your hoaxes," Larsen rumbled, with a kind of fierce eagerness. "Telling the temperature outside by ESP. No doubt you are even anxious to bet again."

"I hadn't thought about it," Corman said, in a solemn voice. "It doesn't seem right to commercialize ESP."

Larsen's face turned purple; he was on the verge of sputtering. Only a few weeks earlier, Corman had demolished, in "Science," all the so-called evidence for precognition based on cards.

"Still," Corman added, "there wouldn't be much harm in betting a dinner for the group again. Certainly, if I can't determine the outside temperature

while sitting here in the room, I'll be happy to stand treat."

There was a dead silence, so that through the closed windows we could hear the shrill chirping of crickets in the shrubbery, and farther off, by the reservoir, the piping of tree frogs. Even the women were interested.

"I'll bet you," Larsen said grimly, "but this time I'll set the conditions. Otherwise, no deal."

"Up to a point, Nils. Up to a point. It can't be all one-sided. For example, temperature is obviously a continuous function of time, but the readings are not necessarily integral. And then there are micro climates—places only a few inches apart that have different temperatures. All I ask is that the thermometer be placed, say, two inches from the ground, roughly in the middle of the lawn, and that I be allowed an error of plus or minus two degrees. Aside from that, all conditions are yours."

Larsen caught Lambert's eye; the younger man nodded slightly; and Larsen said: "I accept." He rubbed his hands together, and announced: "First, you must strip down to your shorts—you'll wear Lambert's trench-coat. No devices hid in cigarette holders this time, hey!"

"No objection," Corman squeaked. He went with Larsen and Lambert into an ante-room, and came out a few minutes later

wearing Lambert's tan coat, much too short for him, so that his lean, hairy shanks were exposed. Some of the women giggled at the sight, but Corman was unperturbed.

Larsen now ostentatiously examined the old man's ears, and then blindfolded him. Not content with this, he glanced meaningly at the big electric clock on the wall, and seated Corman in an opposite corner, with his back to the dial.

"With ESP," he said, "you could tell time without a clock. Besides, it won't matter what the clock says: when I ask for a reading, all you have to do is announce the temperature at that moment. Lambert and—Dr. Corby?—will you two get a thermometer, and put it in the center of the lawn, about two inches up. Make a support from a stick and wire—yes?" The two men agreed, and left.

"You know, of course," Corman shrilled, "that none of these childish precautions affect ESP."

"Knock it off!" Larsen snapped. "I may believe in ESP, but you—never!"

"Ah, but it may be the unbeliever who has the power."

"That's right," Dr. Harris said, grinning. "He has a point, Larsen. According to experts, the espers are seldom aware of their talent, and may not even believe in it at first."

"We all know Corman's no esper," Larsen said. "This is just another trick, only it won't work. Want to pay up now, Corman?"

"On the contrary," the old man replied. "I'm anxious to demonstrate my talent immediately."

Oddly enough, it was Larsen who perspired visibly; his forehead was quite damp. And it was only seventy-eight in the room, and wouldn't have been that high, except for the women, who are always chilly.

Lambert returned.

"All set outside," he declared.

"Good," Larsen said. "This is how we'll do it. I'll ask Corman for a reading, then open the door, and call 'Mark One.' That's the signal for you and Dr. Corby to read the thermometer and record the temperature." He handed Lambert a clipboard. "When I call 'Mark Two,' do it again, and so on, for all ten entries. I think," he added turning towards Corman, "that such readings, at irregular, random intervals, should settle the matter."

"I agree," Corman said, and I thought his shoulders quivered slightly.

LARSEN sent Lambert back out to Corby, checked Corman's blindfold, faced him more squarely into the blind corner of the room, and said: "Now, then—what's the temperature at this time?"

Even though there was no reason for it, the room became perfectly silent: a purely psychological reaction. I watched Corman closely, but he seemed relaxed. From my position far to one side, I noticed only one unusual thing. Normally, when sitting, he kept his hands in his pockets; but now, possibly because of having no pants under the coat, he seemed to have them clasped in his lap.

For a few seconds he didn't reply; then he said evenly: "Eighty-two degrees—Fahrenheit, of course."

Larsen whipped the door open, and yelled "Mark One!" Several of us in the room recorded Corman's estimate.

Larsen waited about eighteen minutes, and then demanded another reading.

"Still almost eighty-two," Corman said.

"Mark Two!" Larsen boomed to his assistants outside.

Normally, here on the edge of the desert, there is a rather rapid fall in temperature after sundown, so that nobody was surprised when later readings, irregularly spaced, were much lower. And once, because of some vagrant drift of warm air from the hot flats, there was a rise of several degrees.

As usual, Corman's confidence was making Larsen squirm. It didn't seem possible that the old

man could have hoaxed him again, in spite of all the precautions, but Larsen was obviously unhappy.

Finally the tenth reading was given and recorded, and Larsen called his helpers in. When the two lists were compared, they stood as follows:

Number	Corman's Estimate	Thermometer
1.	82	80.6
2.	82	80.9
3.	75	75.4
4.	75	74.8
5.	74	74.2
6.	71	71.5
7.	76	77.3
8.	71	72.0
9.	71	71.7
10.	70	70.6

I think Lambert was more crestfallen than Larsen; the latter half expected it, I felt, and no longer hoped to win against the old man. Lambert loudly derided the ESP explanation, and tried to make Corman give the true one, but all he got was a gentle comment: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio—pardon me; I mean Ken—but you know the quote. What I can't understand is why Larsen is so opposed to the ESP theory; usually, he's always plumping for it!"

Larsen gritted his teeth, but said nothing.

For the first time, I had no inkling of the solution, myself, but meant to find out. And I did, by cornering the old man a few days later, and blocking his way to the water cooler.

"I'm thirsty as hell," Corman said, "so you've got me over a barrel. Now if I were twenty years younger, my lad, I'd flip you over that desk! Not that I'd hoped to keep the secret much longer. There must be *somebody* around here who knows something besides physical science."

"Meaning?" I prompted him.

"Meaning that biology can be useful, too. I had help on the outside—a thousand to one against Larsen's two."

I gaped at him.

"It's not very well known," he went on, "at least among mathematicians, astronomers, and physicists, but there are simple formulas connecting air temperature with the chirping frequency of certain species of crickets. For one kind here, it's merely this: Count the number of chirps in fifteen seconds, and add forty. The sum is the temperature in degrees Fahrenheit. You'll find it in Lutz, and also Pierce's book, 'The Songs of Insects.'"

"As simple as that," I said. Then, puzzled: "But you couldn't see the clock."

"I'm surprised at you," he told me reproachfully. "Forget-

ting Galileo and his pendulum so easily. A man's pulse, once he's checked it out, is an ideal timer. My own, for example, beats at a steady rate of seventy per minute—at least, in the early evening. In other words seven beats every six seconds."

I reflected for a moment.

"For eighty degrees, then, you must have counted forty chirps in fifteen seconds—isn't that hard to do?"

"Not with practice. Anybody can count aloud faster than that."

"So that's why you clasped your hands—you were taking your own pulse!"

"Naturally."

"What if Larsen had plugged your ears?"

"It's not easy to keep out those shrill chirps; you noted, subconsciously, I'm sure, how they came right through the walls, even. Now, if he'd tied my hands behind me; or if the temperature had dropped below seventy . . ."

"Below forty, the formula must fail; you'd have to subtract, instead of add. But why seventy?"

He grinned.

"Biology again. Most crickets won't sing when the temperature goes below seventy. Larsen would have had me—ah—cold!"

THE END

REDEMPTION

(Continued from page 45)

Kindness from your doorsteps and threw wide your portals to Perdition."

On the shore of Cheseapeake Bay he halted, and when the automatic pilot brought the ship down, he removed the fragments of the statue from the hold and laid them gently on the beach . . . *And the Planet of Peace absorbed His ghost and bore it from the face of the earth.*

A moment later, complete transmission occurred.

* * *

The cabin was a lonely place.

He left it quickly and hurried down the companionway to the starboard storeroom. The bulkheads no longer shimmered, and the deck was solid beneath his feet. His translucence was no more. He opened the storeroom lock and stepped across the threshold. Mary Legs, nee Annabelle Leigh, was huddled on the floor. She looked up when she heard his step, and in her eyes was the dumb and hopeless misery of an animal that is cornered and does not know what to do.

He raised her gently to her feet. "Next stop, Iago Iago," he said.

THE END

Sight returns . . . and a wind from the hill presses a few green blades before his eyes. He moves his cheek slightly, and the grass feels good beneath his face.

Without moving, Ben glanced at the hill, getting his bearings. He was in a shallow green depression, just below the steep approach. Out of the forest, then—but not in sight of the people. Good. Best to just rest where he was and not try to see them yet. Not for awhile. When he told them—when he had to try to explain it without understanding it himself—the telling itself would be bad enough.

They'd know. They'd smell it on him and see it in his eyes, and the way he was now—no, best to wait.

The terrified colonists did not know the rules, nor the Player. They saw the Penalties come screaming back, dead or dying. And remorselessly the being in the alien wood commanded them to keep on playing . . .



the

GAME



By NEAL BARRETT, JR.

Illustrated by ADKINS

Finally, he raised himself on one arm and gazed over the rolling grassland to the east. His farmer's eye probed beneath the green cover and into the texture of the soil itself. Rich, incredibly fertile soil, he knew. There had been no time yet for tests, but he had held the dark, moist grains in his hand, and he knew.

It was the first thing they did after the ship left them, the last sound of its thunder lost in the sky. He looked at the others, and they all held little mounds of the alien soil, and their thoughts were the same as his own. Here was the reason they had come—here was ground that had never felt the cleave of iron or the fall of a seed from a human hand.

That had been—when? Two days ago? It seemed, to Ben, a pitifully short history of a colony. The dream was over—and who would be present to record the nightmare to come?

THEY were waiting for him at the top of the hill; fifty men and women in overalls and colored shirts and bright print dresses—new things that had not had time to gain the washed and faded status of workclothes. They were farmers, like himself, and they stood in close, somber groups of five or six, their women in shadow-clusters a few steps behind.

Esther stood a little apart from

the others—not too far—just enough to define herself as Leader's wife. He glanced at her quickly, without smiling, and she nodded and followed him with her eyes.

He moved in among them, and when he stopped they formed a rough half-circle around him. They waited, watching, but saying nothing.

A tall man stepped forward. His lean face was dark and wind-drawn. He nodded, and shifted his weight from one long leg to the other.

"Ben . . ." he said.

Ben nodded. "Hello, Roy."

Roy squinted at him. "You all right, Ben?"

"Yes. I'm fine. A little tired is all."

"Don't *look* too good," said Roy. He raised one shaggy brow and glanced at the circle for confirmation. The men nodded in silent agreement.

"I'm fine," Ben smiled. "I said I was all right, didn't I?" He knows, thought Ben. Roy knows. I can't lie to him any more than I could to Esther.

Roy studied him a long moment, then laid a strong hand on his arm.

"It wasn't no joke, was it Ben? There's something really out there?"

Ben knew it wasn't a question. He looked at Roy, then at the ground. And suddenly he knew

he couldn't tell them. After all the times he had gone over it in his mind and worked out how he was going to do it, now he knew it was all wrong. He knew if he opened his mouth the words wouldn't come out the way he wanted at all.

"Yes, Roy—something. I—don't know just what."

He looked at the men, his eyes resting for a moment on each face.

"We've got some trouble," he said simply. "It's not going to be good."

They nodded at him and he knew they were trying to say yes, they understood; they had been expecting bad news, and he wanted to scream at them and tell them no! no! You weren't expecting *this*! You *don't* understand, you *don't*!

He could feel the cold beads of sweat forming on his face, and he felt a terrible need to look at Esther but she was lost somewhere in the sea of faces.

Esther! Esther! How little time!

"Listen," he said, trying to choose his words and not say the wrong thing. "I think we better have a meeting in a half hour. I'll tell you all I can then."

He caught the slight frowns, the light scatter of mumbled objections and disappointment, but no one seemed to care to make an issue of it.

"Thanks," he said, "I'm a little tired, and I'd like to gather my words. I—can't talk normal, I guess, without a Mule up front to listen."

A few of the men laughed softly, and the women turned to each other and nodded.

"All right," said Roy, and the way he said it Ben knew that some of the fear had come across. "Later, Ben, when you're ready."

"Not later—now!"

Ben turned, and he knew right where to look. The man edging through the crowd was solid, built low to the ground, as if his frame were married to the earth like a tree. A thatch of sun-bleached hair covered eyes frozen in perpetual challenge.

Ben resigned himself to trouble, knowing little else could come from an encounter with Ork Miller.

"All right, Ork, what is it?" But he knew what it was—whatever Ork might say, the thing behind it was Esther. Ork stopped a few feet from Ben.

"Been here all day, Ben," he said lazily, "same as everyone else. Whatever it is, right now's a good time."

Roy Tate moved. "Miller—"

"No, Roy," Ben said, keeping his eyes on Ork.

Ork grinned. "Right Ben. Let's get on with it." He winked in Esther's direction. "Won't keep you—know you're in a—hurry."

Ben hit him. He felt bone and cartilage collapse a second before pain shot back through his own arm and shoulder.

Ben studied the faces around him, reading neither approval nor censure. "Whatever you're thinking," he said, "think it." He turned and walked away, feeling Esther's presence behind him.

FOR a long time she said nothing, then she spoke very softly.

"Is it bad, Ben? Is it going to be really bad?"

His eyes were closed and his head rested on the coolness of her legs. He opened his eyes and looked at her. She smiled, and he reached up and touched her gently. She blushed slightly and turned her head so he could just catch the corner of a smile.

He laughed softly. "Damned if I didn't get one of those modest country girls you read about in the magazines!" He said it with an exaggerated midwestern twang that usually made her laugh.

She looked back at him, but the beginning of a smile died on her lips. Ben stood up and moved to his own cot. He sat for a long moment staring at the translucent walls of the shelter.

"All right," he said finally, "yes. It's bad. It's about as bad as it can get, I think, and I—can't even explain what it is."

He faced her. "I was there, Esther—where it happened. And it talked to me and told me things, and it—didn't even seem bad, then, because it wasn't real and it wasn't me . . . it couldn't have been me, could it?"

For a moment he said nothing. It was hard to make the words come at all, and he wondered whether it was his own protective barrier against fear—or something they had put there.

"Ben—"

"No, wait Esther. Listen, I was about five, and I remember my grandmother—she was very old. She used to tell the same story over and over, and the grownups always listened to her—and the kids weren't supposed to. But we heard, of course. She must have been about the same age we were when it happened, and we liked stories like that. She told about how everyone got the bomb, finally, and people knew the missiles might come, by the thousands, any minute. The newspapers and TV said no one on earth would live through it. And the grownups always asked the same question: Well, what did you do, what did you *do*? And she'd smile and say, why, nothing. We didn't do anything. Some people thought about a shelter, but mostly we just went about our business."

Ben moved to her and grabbed her shoulders hard. "Don't you

see? No matter how often she told it—*no one believed her!* No one understood how you can take just so much horror and then you can't even be scared anymore! It's happened to me, Esther—I *know* what's going to happen, but I can't—"

Then she was there, her face hard against his shoulder.

"Oh, Ben, Ben—Ben!"

She raised her face to meet him and he caught a flash of wide eyes and soft tears and the shock ground in at the base of his spine and ripped a jagged blade through his head. He jerked up and his back looped itself into a jarring arc, turning him around and crushing him against the side of the shelter. The room swam, he opened his mouth and words came spewing out like shapeless frogs.

"Esssssssstooooor!"

She shrank from him, her face a frozen mask. He staggered toward her, the spasms coming in waves of pain, jerking his muscles like snakes across his body. A bone snapped in his wrist and he dropped like a stone to the floor.

She was saying something, but he couldn't understand what it was. She trembled against him and he was aware of hot tears against the brittle cold of his shoulder. The need he felt for her, the wave of undiluted hunger, was almost overpowering. If he could take what she could give

him, purge away the stain the gray finger had left when it touched his mind in that one small second: . . .

Instead, he raised himself on shaky arms and retched violently. She caught him before he dropped back into his own sickness.

THE challenge came like an unfamiliar odor climbing out of the forest and up the hill. They all felt it, and stopped whatever they were doing to listen. They knew—instinctively: *alien* . . . *ALIEN!*

Some Colony conditioning course should have softened the blow, but then—there weren't supposed to be any aliens on Newhio, and there were plenty of other things to learn about surviving on a new planet. So, for Ben, all the barriers of fear were left standing. He walked down the hill and stepped into the forest armed only with the shock of unbelief.

Terror hit him like a physical blow at the first recognizable pillar of stone. The dark, strangely-faceted column seemed completely natural among the flower-crested trees and dank ferns.

It was not a *copy* of nature—he knew that. Somehow, a copy wouldn't have been so bad. It was an abstraction, a symbol—a quick, deftly rendered and highly refined sketch; it was the breath

and life of the forest and the touch of the thing that had made it. It was art—a terrible alien art he shrank from with every earth-born atom of his body.

He came very close to turning back. He remembered the others waiting on the hill above the forest. He remembered Esther, straight and proud, smiling all the way into the shadows of the first grove of trees; smiling against her fear and his, and forgetting he always read everything in her eyes.

He passed under delicate archways and over narrow pathways cut from the underlying stone. He was afraid, and he knew his fear was being softly cushioned by some powerful empathy, something that chose to protect him for the moment from itself.

Then—the guiding hand was against his naked mind.

No aliens. . . . no aliens. . . . no aliens . . . no!

He stood in the dark circle of stone, thick forest cover veiling all but a touch of the day.

Harker. . . .

Again, the shield—

Listen, Player Ben Harker . . . Listen to the Rules of the Game. . . .

He opened his eyes, and she was watching him. He felt the sickness in his mouth, and she brought him something hot. The searing liquid was pleasant, fa-

miliar pain, and brought him fully awake.

"Is it all right, now?"

"Yes. I think so. I—"

"What, Ben?"

"Nothing . . ." He moved, and the pain in his wrist made him remember. She touched his arm lightly, but with a slight hesitancy he knew she instantly regreted.

"I wrapped it as well as I could. I think it broke when—"

"Convulsion. That's the word, Esther."

"Ben, don't! You don't have to be that way with me. Not with me."

She touched his shoulder lightly. He jerked away.

"No, damn it, don't—you—see! That—is—over!"

She shook her head, staring at him. "I did that, Ben? I did that to you? No, Ben!"

"Oh, yes," he said, "oh, yes, Ben." The cold detachment of his own voice startled him. He didn't want it that way, but he could feel nothing else. Not now. Not unless he wanted to go to her and hold her and let that thing out there wrench his leg out of joint or maybe break his spine in half.

He looked at her once more, for a long moment, wanting this look to last. Then he turned and left.

THEY didn't believe him. He knew they wouldn't. They stared, cautiously, fearfully,

wondering why he should want to tell them such things.

Thad Baxter stood up and glared. "I don't understand, Ben, but I know this. Whatever your filthy idea is, *my* wife isn't going to have—"

"Shut up, Thad, and listen!" He paused, searched their faces, and tried to calculate the instant they would turn their fear and anger on him.

"All right," he said. "All right." It had to be this way, he knew, because it was the only thing they'd understand.

"Kiss your wife, Thad."

Thad frowned. "Whaaat? Listen here—"

"We should have listened to Ork, maybe," someone mumbled.

"Go on," Ben said tightly, "kiss her! Damn it, just kiss her!"

Roy Tate studied Ben curiously. He turned to Thad.

"All right, go on," he said quietly. "Can't hurt anything, Thad."

Thad glared, but leaned over cautiously and touched his lips lightly against his wife's cheek. The girl smiled, and a few people laughed nervously.

Thad faced Ben with a cold eye. "You get some dirty kick out of that? Is that it?" He pulled his wife to him. "See? You get it now? Leader gets *all* the women and—*thuuuuuuurc!*"

Thad doubled and dropped in a writhing heap. The girl screamed a high note Ben thought would hang in the air forever. She paled and Roy caught her as she fell. Two men quickly thrust a scrap of wood in Thad's jaws.

"All right," yelled Ben, "now sit down!"

Fifty pair of eyes stared at him, and there was nothing he could see but fear.

"I'm sorry," he said softly. "It happened to me, but you didn't see it—I guess you have to see it. I don't understand it, and I don't expect you to. But the women come under the rules of the Game—and—they don't belong to us—any more. Not until we're told they do. . . ."

He was expecting it and he was ready when they rose and surged toward him. He pulled the pistol from his pocket and fired once over their heads. They paused.

"Drop that, Ben! Drop it!"

He held the gun at arm's length, trying to cover them all at once. "Stay away from the women!" he yelled. "Don't touch them! Don't go near them! After this meeting the women will stay here while the men move their things to the shelters on the left slope of the hill, then—"

Thad Baxter groaned and turned over. His wife was still stretched out limply beside him. Remembering Thad seemed to set

them off again. A few men moved closer.

Ben turned on them. "My God, don't you understand! You think I did that? Do you? *Do you!*"

The rock hit him just above the right eye and he dropped as the blackness rolled over him.

* * *

Roy's face swam in a field of blinding red light. Something was wrong. One eye wouldn't open and the other couldn't seem to hold anything in proper focus.

"You all right?"

A surge of faraway noise reached his ears and he sat up suddenly. The light flashed again and doubled him up on the ground.

"Roy," he moaned, "what happened?"

"Ork Miller beaned you one, that's what!" snapped Roy. "And you nearly got more than that. I guess you can thank Jack Tinner for being alive. He saw what happened to Thad and knew dang well you didn't do it—so he turned 'em all on that—thing out there, 'stead of you. They—"

"What? WHAT!" Ben jerked up, ignoring the pain. The buzzing in his ears suddenly made sense. He broke away from Roy and ran to the door of the shelter. His stomach was a hard knot. They were in the center of the clearing, an angry mob of men and women. He had known them all for months, but there

was no trace of recognition on their faces now.

Some of the men were tearing open crates and boxes and passing out pitchforks, axes—anything that seemed to fit the curve of their hands. A few of them had found the precious rifles and ammunition.

"No! Oh, *no!*" He strained against Roy's grip and the tall man slammed him against the shelter.

"Now look, damn it," warned Roy, "you can't do nothin' about this, Ben!" He held Ben firmly against the shelter, and Ben stared numbly at the clearing.

Ork Miller found the guns first. Sweat gleamed across his broad face and his stubby fingers whitened around the stock of the rifle. He opened his mouth and laughed to the sky, then ran across the camp in the direction of the forest.

It was too fast. No one saw it, and it was a long moment before anyone even knew something was wrong. One minute Ork was running from them, down the slope of the hill—then, without stopping, or turning—or anything, he was coming back again. Only coming back it wasn't really Ork any more.

Momentum carried him ten yards back into the clearing. The way he was, he couldn't have come that far on his own. Then he turned crazily and stumbled,

and began to crawl, only it looked a whole lot worse than crawling.

Thad Baxter took a rifle from someone and shot Ork through his "head" twenty-eight times then kept holding the trigger back until he realized the ammunition was gone.

THE men moved their things to the shelters Ben had chosen, and no one else tried to lead an attack into the forest. In the morning, after a night when no one slept at all—or tried to—the names of all the wives went into a box in the center of the clearing. Betty Fenner's name was drawn first, and Jack Fenner screamed beneath the four men who were holding him down.

"I don't like this, Ben," said Roy tightly.

It seemed a foolish thing to say. Ben turned away wearily.

"No one *likes* it, Roy . . ."

Roy grabbed his arm and turned him around. "Is it any worse if we just take our chances? If *my* wife is going to die, I don't want her to do it down there!"

Ben looked straight ahead. "We don't know that they die. We don't know that."

Roy laughed. "Well, hell, Ben, maybe you're right—maybe they just kinda get turned inside out, like old Ork, maybe?"

Ben shut his eyes. "Shut up, Roy. Just shut up—now."

"Oh, sure," said Roy, "I can do that."

"Besides," Ben recited, "Ork was a man." He tried to bring some kind of feeling to his words, but something was all hollow inside, and empty, and he couldn't make it right again.

"He was a man, and men aren't allowed in the 'Game Area.' We don't know what happens to the women."

Roy just looked at him. "Okay said Ben. "We have an idea what to expect—we don't *know*."

Jack Fenner was staring at him from across the clearing. Ben looked away. Fenner was up now, but they still held him. He watched his wife a few yards away. Just watched her, and did not try to say anything at all.

"You got any other ideas?" said Ben. "We *don't* play the Game, I have a pretty good idea what happens. We gain some time to think, Roy—work something out. Maybe we can get a Beacon going."

Roy spat. "Beacon, hell. A bunch of farmers can't build a Beacon and you know it."

Ben spoke more to himself than to Roy. "It's one woman at a time—not twenty-five. We agreed there was nothing else—all of us, Roy."

"I'd rather get it over with," Roy said darkly, "—now."

Ben looked at him. Roy Tate was a gentle man. But there was

no sign of the gentleness there now.

"Kill Trudy," said Ben simply.

"Yes," Roy answered. "Kill her."

Ben shook his head slowly. "You know she can't die, Roy. They haven't even left us that."

BETTY FENNER walked down the hill toward the forest. It was a beautiful day, and Ben and the others watched her until the pale blue dress blended with the shadows of the trees and the yellow hair no longer reflected the bright alien sun. There was nothing else to do. They all stood for a moment on the brink of the hill before sorrow and anger gave way to helplessness and shame. Then they drifted off to do something, or pretend to, and no two men walked away together.

Only the women huddled in small groups, going about whatever tasks were necessary. Everyone still had to eat, so there would be strength enough to maybe die tomorrow.

Ben saw Esther, standing across the strip that now separated the men from their wives.

"Is—your head any better, Ben?"

"Yes. It's fine now."

"Oh, well, good . . . you have everything you need? You don't need anything I can bring you? I could leave it here, and—"

"No. I don't think so, Esther. Thanks."

"Oh, well . . ."

Their eyes met for a long moment, then she turned and disappeared behind her shelter.

* * *

The "critique" arrived in the last hours of evening. It was a shimmering azure curtain, and it hung in the air a few feet above the ground. It seemed to enlarge and contract slightly around the edges, with a steady, pulsating beat.

Ben had no idea how long it might stay there, and one of the women was permitted across the line long enough to copy it in shorthand. Long before she finished, the last bit of hope Ben had carefully nourished, faded away. It was obvious enough, now—they were field mice playing chess with a Russian Master. It was a position nothing short of insanity.

The critique read:

PLAYER BEN HARKER—

Commitment (entering)
(creation) of (Pawn)
(equipment) equated 34.7**.
* 5 (L) (?) in (Game Entrance). L Quad/C terminated.

Rate: 4 G
Penalty: (Drone-prior-time/
relation-start) ((**)) (T)
Adjusted (?) Vector—J
(RR/RR/ . . .

Hern Veckal shook his head and turned from the fire. "It doesn't make sense—not a damn *bit* of sense!

"You think it would, Hern?" Thad Baxter smiled grimly. Thad had come off a little easier, Ben noted. He favored one arm slightly, but no bones broken.

"You really expected," Thad said, "to make something out of that—that—"

"All right, take it easy," said Ben. "One way, Thad, that—scoreboard—showing up like that—it's a good thing."

The five men watched him expectantly.

"It's not good for a man to be at a dead end, but it's a lot better to *know* it, if he is, so he doesn't keep butting his head against the same wall."

"You mean," asked Marc Stenger, the youngest one there, "that you figure there's nothing to do—we just sit here, and—"

Ben raised a hand. "Now hold it. I didn't say that. I just said we can mark off one approach as closed—and face it and quit worrying about it. Before," he explained, "we couldn't be certain there wasn't some way to figure out just what we were up against. I mean, I hadn't given up the idea that whatever it is out there had to have *something* in common with us—something we could use against it. I know better now."

"And that," Roy said flatly, "is a good deal for us, huh?"

Ben nodded vehemently. "All right, Roy, yes! Damn right it is! Look. I heard all the talk—this afternoon, when the message came through. Every man in camp had some idea of—of translating the thing, figuring out what it meant. That, is a waste of time, and we all know it! Sure, we made *some* sense out of it. Betty Fenner's the Pawn—and Ork is, was, the Drone that tried to leave the area before the Game began. What else? A score, maybe—but so what? Part of it could be math of some kind, but we have people here that have had some pretty heady stuff—and *no* one says there's anything there that remotely relates to anything we know."

"There's no way," said Jack Tinner, "no way at all to deal with it—or even understand why it's doing this to us . . ."

Ben nodded. "When I was out there," he said quietly, "talking to the thing—it's like you say something and it just talks right over you—not as if it didn't *care* what you said—it just doesn't *recognize* you're there enough to listen! I don't even think it's capable of the idea that something could communicate back to it."

Roy shifted in front of the fire. "Which leaves us just where, Ben?"

"Just about zero," said Ben

grimly, "unless we can get our minds to working and figure our way out *on our own*—without even considering the thing we're fighting."

"That's not easy," Roy suggested, "winning the war while ignoring the enemy."

Ben caught Roy's eye and held it a moment. He remembered Roy's acid comments of the afternoon, and didn't want them repeated now.

"There's the Beacon," he said, "there's a pretty fair possibility there." Roy shrugged almost imperceptively, but managed to keep quiet.

Ben turned to Jim Hubbard. He was nearly invisible at the edge of the gathering, and he had been there, without speaking, throughout the conversation. Jim looked up warily, and Ben wished to hell he could at least keep the hangdog look of doom to himself long enough to inject a little hope into the group.

"Well," Hubbard began reluctantly, "like I told Ben, I can't promise anything. I had some Agricultural Electronics, but that isn't too close to Beacon technology. Hell, not close at all!"

Ben took a deep breath before he spoke. "Sure, Jim, we understand—and we don't expect you to do any more than you can. But just tell them what you told me—about the *possibility* of getting something going."

Jim displayed a sick grin. "Well, okay—only, I don't know . . . I've been through the stuff we've got—all of it. There's just *about* everything we need to *make* a Beacon, that is, to make something that can do what a Beacon does. But about the equipment to put it all together, or—" he shrugged, "whether I've got the know-how to do it. . . ."

Ben touched the boy's arm. "You know how important it is, Jim. Just give it all you can." Jim grinned, a wide, gap-toothed attempt at enthusiasm. Ben could have hit him in the teeth.

Marc Stenger gave a low moan and jumped to his feet. He ran a bony hand over his face and stared at them like a man addressing a conclave of idiots.

"That's it, then?" he whispered. "That's what we're counting on—this—this—tractor mechanic is going to build a Beacon out of—of—cultivator batteries and Plowmechs? Him? *Him?*"

Ben raised up and pulled the boy down hard to the ground.

"Now you just take it easy, son," he said quietly, "—and just what the hell might you have to suggest? Eh? What!"

Marc stared at him a moment, then shook him off and walked out of the fire light toward his shelter.

"It's not like that at all," Ben explained. "We *do* have the parts and Jim's a damn-sight more

qualified than anyone else around here. I want you to give him—all the support you can." He let his gaze touch on each one of them in turn.

"I don't want my wife to go either," he said. "We've got to try something."

"It's not that the Beacon is so *complicated*," Jim blurted out loudly, "it's just a matter of—ah, boosting a signal up high enough to get a message *into* non-space, and, ah—ha! ha!—if you'll all give me your support—"

"You shut him up, Ben," Jack Tinner said darkly, "or I'm a-gonna kill him right here . . ."

BEN wished it could have been almost anyone else, but it wasn't. Elaine Stenger, seventeen, was a slight, willowy young girl just tomorrow away from becoming a woman. When Ben drew her name Marc didn't even look up. Elaine made a low noise in her throat and fell into a small and pitiful heap. The women had to make her leave the hill and none of the men could watch that.

When she was halfway down the slope, she seemed to realize what was really happening to her. She turned and looked at them with wide, frightened eyes. Then she screamed. She screamed until Ben thought his guts would eat their way out and shrivel in the sun. Then, suddenly, she turned and ran down the hill as

fast as she could. It was, thought Ben queerly, as if she had just remembered she had something she wanted to do.

After that, after what they had done, even the women remained apart from each other. They left meals for their men in the "neutral" strip, then shuffled back to their shelters. Most of the plates were untouched when they came back for them.

Ben didn't try to find Esther.

HE SPENT a full and frustrating day with Jim on the Beacon, but evening brought anything but rest. Two men started fighting over absolutely nothing—except raw nerves—and three others saw fit to join in for the same reason. Before Ben and his crew could stop it, one man was near death from an axe wound in his neck, and two more were badly cut up.

Tom Dockman took advantage of the fight. He was a quiet, sandy-haired man in his forties, and he took out a pistol he had hidden since the day of the riot and shot his wife in the head six times. Each time, (those who were near reported later) the bullets came within an inch of the woman and then disappeared in a hazy blue spot.

When Dockman found that it couldn't be done, he moaned something at his wife and put

the pistol to his own head. It worked fine for him.

The way the woman looked after that, Ben was sorry Dockman hadn't had his way. She told Ben she hadn't really believed she couldn't die, so she asked her husband to shoot her. There was little sleep for anyone the rest of the night. Every time Ben thought about the guns in the camp the hair on his neck began to stiffen. He recounted the guns and put a couple of more guards around them, but by this time the inventory sheet had disappeared and he had no idea how many guns there had been in the first place . . .

* * *

On the third morning it was Mary Vaneck—a tall, dark-eyed girl who reminded Ben too much of Esther.

That evening, Mary came back. Ben knew pretty well what had happened when he heard the women screaming her name from the edge of the hill. He almost knew—

Harry Vaneck wanted to shoot his wife, but Ben knew he'd turn the gun on himself—and maybe all the rest of them too.

So Ben took the job. As he looked at her over the sights the thought passed quickly through his mind that there was enough of Mary left to know what he was doing and it was all right.

When the shiny, featureless pink globe on her shoulders exploded she collapsed like shattered glass and there was no way to even guess what she had been.

So we're given this privilege, anyway, Ben reminded himself bitterly. After it's through with them—we can do what we want. He raised a quick and silent prayer for small favors.

Facing them, he realized with a shock that he couldn't seem to recognize any of them. There's not much left, he told himself, there's nothing left here to fight with . . .

"We didn't know," he told them, "we were afraid, and thought something might happen to them—but we didn't *know!*" Now, I can't—make—that—decision—again!" He moved from one face to the other and they returned his plea with silence. He realized they didn't care what he said—as long as he said something, told them what to do next.

"All right. All right, I'll do it. God knows what that thing out there will do to us, you know that? You know that, don't you!"

The silent faces turned away and left him in the clearing under the bright alien sun.

"We send no more, then!" he screamed at their backs. "All right? Is that all right? *No more!*"

They were gone, and Roy Tate was left, and behind him across the imaginary line, Esther. He looked at her, then looked at her again. There was something in her eyes that hadn't been there before. The frightened, fearful Esther was gone, and an Esther with battle-tired strength stood in her place. The warmly-smiling-showpiece, the sympathetic-ornament, the doll-with-flesh-that-really works was gone.

He watched this new thing that had been given to him with a vague sense of wonder. It was a dim star that rode into brilliance out of a dark cloud—and then the cloud covered it again and killed it and smothered its fire and he turned away from it. He suddenly remembered that stars burned and destroyed what they touched, and he could not recall when this had not been so.

THE critique arrived at its usual time that evening, and he glanced at it briefly and noted that Pawn had been returned through countermove L, or something. It was a cold epitaph for Mary Vaneck.

Ben had not copied the critiques since the first one. He read a few more lines and turned away. For the first time, he wondered vaguely whether they were winning or losing the Game—or if it made a damn bit of difference one way or the other.

In the gray light of false dawn, the haggard figures stood around a weird assortment of unrecognizable apparatus that was wired, glued, taped and piled in the rough shape of a cone. Thick black cables snaked in and out of the cone itself and finally led off a few feet into a squat black ellipse.

"By God," breathed Roy Tate, "it sorta *looks* like a Beacon."

"Well," said Ben wearily, "what about it, Jim?"

Jim Hubbard, who had been thin, gaunt and red-eyed before joining the Colony, looked barely human now. He blinked to keep his eyes open and squatted down next to the cone.

"I—I—don't know, Ben." He ran his hand over one of the dark cables and glanced nervously at the figures above him. "If it gets power, y-yes—maybe it'll s-send. I d-don't know!"

Ben closed his eyes, then jerked them open quickly as the dizzy waves swarmed in. He nodded toward the squat black ellipse and took a deep breath.

"We've got about ten years of pretty substantial power in that fuel pile, Jim—it damn sure ought to be enough to send *one small S.O.S. out of here!*"

Jim's voice came out a high whine. "L-Look, I *told* you about that now, Ben, so don't you *expect* anything! It is *not* how *much* power with a Beacon—its

how much *when*—if it doesn't go out with a—boost—it doesn't get where its goin'! Th-that d-d-damn thing," he pointed jerkily, "is a u-utility pile for givin' off steady consistent p-power. The way I got it rigged it'll either do n-nothing at all, or send our s-signal halfway across the d-damn galaxy—or b-blow the h-hell out of all of us."

"If I thought," Ben began, "you could promise that last one—"

The boy's mouth dropped and Ben said wearily, "All right, pull or push whatever it is you do. There's no sense waiting."

The crowd stepped back and Jim made a few last minute adjustments. Then he picked up his make-shift control board, looked at it a moment, then made a few quick motions over its surface. A slight hum came from the fuel pile, and an even slighter one from the "Beacon." Jim stumbled back and dropped the control board to the ground.

Ben felt the hairs on his neck start up again, and the empty pit in his stomach took the next step toward complete vacuity.

"That's—all? That's it?"

Jim nodded weakly, and collapsed to the ground. Roy Tate grabbed Ben's arm. "The pile, Ben—I checked it! The meter shows a little over three-quarters used up!"

Ben reached down and jerked

Hubbard awake. "Damn it, Jim, is it enough? Did we do it?"

Jim frowned, a little surprised, Ben thought, that anything at all had happened.

"Yes," he nodded weakly, the stutter suddenly gone, "*it could* have done it—if everything else held together—it could . . ."

Ben layed him gently on the ground. "All right," he said, "if anyone feels inclined, pray someone hears us . . ."

THE waiting is the worst, Ben decided. At any moment, he expected retaliation, or penalty, or something for not sending one of the women. It was nearly an hour after the usual time for the selection and he could feel the oppressive tension of the others bearing down upon him.

If anything happens now, he considered, they're going to get up and do something. I don't know what—but something. He had a fair idea of what it might be—and the part he played was not a very desirable one.

Their senses were so numbed, their reactions so dulled—that no one saw it until the creature was halfway up the hill. Thad Baxter was first. He didn't speak—he just stared, grabbed Ben and pointed. Ben shoved his way through the crowd already forming on the crest of the hill. He was prepared for almost anything—except for what it was.

It was about waist-high, and it had large, fan-like pink ears that could almost be called transparent. The face was distinctly rodent-like. Gray, wrinkled skin was draped over protruding bones; and although the creature was completely hairless, Ben had the strong feeling that it had once, some time ago, been covered with hair or fur. It stopped a few yards away and held up a hand that was too closely human for comfort. Ben stepped forward a pace.

"First," it announced in a high, rasping voice, "I know your feelings and tell you I am not the Player. Am not responsible for the deaths of your females. I have great sorrow for you."

It seemed to be waiting for a reply. It turned small black eyes on Ben.

"All right. We'll accept that for now. Who are you?"

The creature raised a thin hand and shook his head. "Later for that. Now I have others. The Game is over. You have won."

* * *

No one could recall exactly what happened. There was a moment of stunned immobility, then chaos, in which the small wrinkled visitor showed a remarkable agility for avoiding death by trampling. Esther was through the crowd and in Ben's

arms, and the pain of what had gone before was forgotten. She looked at him, and Ben said "I know you, Esther." Her eyes smiled, and she answered. "And I *know* you, Ben."

His name was Hsu-Kwaiu, as near as they could tell—and his story, told to the assembled colonists, was as terrifying as the one they had experienced.

"Our lives have run the same course," he said sadly. He explained how his race, the Ortai, colonized the planet five-hundred years before—and how the thing in the forest drew them into its deadly Game.

Squatting on his spindly legs, Hsu-Kwaiu told Ben, "We are long-lived, the Ortai, and have different, and stronger—abilities—than you. But we were not strong enough. Eventually, all succumbed to the Game. Now is only myself—out of thousand number who start."

Esther trembled against him, and Ben could feel the shudder that swept through the crowd. Their conclusions were obvious.

Hsu-Kwaiu seemed to sense their emotions. The visible pain in his face told Ben the creature's *abilities* included a highly-developed empathy that left him most vulnerable.

"No," said Hsu-Kwaiu, "Please—I am not to claim full understanding of nature of that which holds us here—but some

advantage has been gained by you. Know this—*is first time any one has beaten it . . .*"

It took some time—but Ben and the others finally understood. Ironically, Hsu-Kwaiu explained, the Ortai had beaten themselves in the Games. Being a highly developed and sensitive race, they had some knowledge of the thing in the forest. They learned that the being was not entirely confined to this Time or Space, but was somehow bound in a complex manner to its planet. They learned that the artifacts in the forest had been built by another race—possibly the original dwellers of the world—and that some kinship or relation had existed between the being and the planet's early inhabitants.

All the Ortai learned was carefully calculated and used to play against the being in the Game. Too late, Hsu-Kwaiu told them, they learned that knowledge was not enough.

Then, nearly five centuries later, the human colonists arrived. By pure necessity, through lack of knowledge, the *random factor* was introduced into the Game.

"Could never happen again—never," the alien sighed. "Still, is within logical framework of possibilities, so element is present waiting to happen, so to speak. A good chess player can never beat a Master—but child

with no understanding might once make random move."

His face twisted into what Ben believed to be a smile. "Is poor analogy lacking completeness. In unbelievable complexities of being's Game, random move has meaning none can fathom. Suffice to know that you—or 'part' of you—is playing Game without your knowledge."

Then, Hsu-Kwaiu seemed to search Ben's mind for meaning and said, "Is like blindfolded man with good hearing in sleeping state cheating at roulette with theoretical magnet."

The analogy turned Ben's stomach over twice.

"In final sense," Hsu-Kwaiu said, "is best to say whatever deities you consider have smiled upon you. This is a certainty."

"If our luck continues," Ben added, "we may be able to leave this world. Of course, Hsu-Kwaiu, you will come with us."

HSU-KWAIU seemed less than enthusiastic after Ben's explanation of the Beacon.

"Fortune be with you," he said sadly, turning away. "As for myself, I expect not to see my world again—but the thought is a pleasant one to contemplate."

Then, gathering his feeble strength, Hsu-Kwaiu rose. "And now must leave," he said. And without another word, he began

to make his way across the clearing.

Ben caught up quickly and faced him. "Just like that? You're going? But where—and why? You explained all your people were gone, you—"

Hsu-Kwaiu's black eyes turned to stone. "No. There is no more to say. You do not understand, Ben Harker? Who I am? Why I am here?"

"Well, I—" Ben could only shake his head blankly.

"There is one question you did not ask me—and did not ask it because I did not allow it to be asked. Do you not wonder, now, that I have freed you of the *restriction to wonder*—how I have evaded the being for five-hundred years?"

Ben grew suddenly cold.

Hsu-Kwaiu nodded. "I did not wish to say this to the others. In truth, I have evaded nothing. Know how I have spent the long centuries—know that I have taken the part of a Player and daily suffered the things your females suffered—only I was the only one left, and the being *lives* to play the Game. So I was not allowed to die."

He faced Ben with eyes that were both cold and full of ancient regret.

"Know, then, that the thing out there who toys with our lives is far too alien to more than sense your presence here.

It is only through myself that it can communicate with you at all."

Ben's fists tightened and the long days of frustrated rage welled up within him.

"No," sighed Hsu-Kwaiu, "you do *not see*. Understand that I am as helpless against its will as you are."

He paused a moment, and seemed to search deeply into Ben's eyes—into the depths of his being.

"This thing—it is not to be comprehended—but I tell you this, what I have learned and come to believe. It is even more a horror than you can realize, for I think it is not the superior, unbelievably intelligent entity the Ortai—and now you—have conceived. It is a thing worse than that. It is not only incomprehensibly alien—it is an unreasoning child—an idiot, a retarded mind groping forever in the prison of its own womb-like mind."

Hsu-Kwaiu shuddered visibly. "It is this thing—unpredictable and terrible—which holds us in its grasp. In recent years I have almost come to believe much of its actions are less attributable to alien logic than to childish irrationality." Hsu-Kwaiu shook his head. "But no, could not be—simply could not be. . . ."

Ben was silent. There was little he could say after Hsu-

Kwaiu's revelations. Each time his thoughts settled on an entity the alien described, his mind rejected that pursuit with savage violence.

"One thing more," said Hsu-Kwaiu. "I have learned to inject some of myself into its actions—little, and to small avail—but some. Enough, I think, to ease the role of your females as they travelled the interdimensional paths of the Game. Did I not say, Ben Harker, that I shared your sorrow?"

And then he turned, and walked toward the bottom of the hill—and the forest.

"Hsu-Kwaiu!"

The alien turned slowly. "Ah, it comes. With release, you feel the need to ask the last question. I will place it for you: What occurs now? I do not know, Ben Harker. I have delt only with losers—never with a winner . . ."

And then he was gone.

DAWN rose uneventfully on the sixth day after Hsu-Kwaiu's visit. Ben discovered that fear is quickly supplanted by other emotions once the stimulus is removed. With each day, tension faded among the colonists.

Still, one part of every mind in the camp travelled through non-space with the message they all now firmly believed had spread

across the galaxy from Jim Hubbard's cone.

Admittedly, it was sometimes difficult for even a small part of Ben's mind to make that jump into non-space—or very much of anywhere beyond the warmth of Esther's presence.

Now, as morning announced itself, he watched her rise and leave him. She stood for a moment, running a comb through her dark hair, clothed in the pale translucence of the shelter. She pulled a robe over her shoulders and came to sit beside him.

"It's over now, Ben. It is all over and I know it will never come again."

Before, he might have read pleading in her voice, and her eyes; but now he knew she was not asking for assurance, but giving it.

He watched her, but the strength in her gaze remained steady. Then she came to him and what he had lost forever was returned, and he believed completely in tomorrow.

* * *

There was the scream and the running feet and the shattering of the dream. They were wrapping a white cloth around Roy's hand, and the red staining the white seemed unbearably bright.

"It was instinct—or habit, I guess," Roy said grimly. "And I guess I was lucky."

Ben understood. They had all

become used to testing the field that surrounded them during the Game—especially after Ork.

Ben looked at Roy and Roy said "Yes. It's up again."

... But we won! Hsu-Kwaiu, you're there. Tell it we won!

For the first time, with an almost unnatural clarity, Ben fully understood Hsu-Kwaiu's picture of a childlike alien mind warping all logic and reason to fit its own completely self-oriented needs. A being that perceived the image of the universe, shattered it, and reshaped it to fit the Game.

But Ben saw something else—something Hsu-Kwaiu had not. Childish and mad it might be, but it was a precocious maniac—if maniac it was at all—and it knew how to get the answers it could not reason or re-shape for itself. It had, Ben believed, used Hsu-Kwaiu himself to find a solution that was readily available in its captive environment. It was the type of thing a selfish human child would do.

But this is not a child, not a child in any sense of the word I can understand. This is not a question of a four-year-old who does not like to lose—it is the demand of something incomprehensible . . .

The blue haze shimmered in the clearing.

Best.....it read,

.....two out of three?

THE END

AMAZING STORIES

The Yes Men of Venus

By RON GOULART

Privileged we are to bring you this historic story—one which will warm the manly hearts of the legion of devoted admirers of that venerable fantasist, Arthur Wright Beemis.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE: let me begin by expressing my thanks to the executors of the Arthur Wright Beemis Estate for choosing me to complete his unfinished stories, of which this is to be the first. Like so many others I have long been an admirer of the books of the venerable fantasist. Nothing has ever given me the thrill that reading his first novel, *Roo-So Of The Jungle*, in installments of varying length in the old *Thursby's All-Star Electrical Fiction Weekly* did. Unless it was reading the twenty three sequels, especially *Roo-So's Revenge* and *Roo-So, Friend Of Animals*.

This present story belongs with Beemis' planet adventure yarns. It was in the winter months of 1929 that Arthur Wright Beemis penned the first of his many scientifiction nov-

els. In an era when space travel was little known or speculated on Beemis had his likeable two-fisted hero, Hyacinth Robinson, travel between planets with ease. Hyacinth Robinson, as you may remember, had been standing too near a reservoir in upstate New York and when the water evaporated he went with it, eventually drifting to Venus where most of *Vandals Of Venus* takes place. This story was an instant hit and was soon followed by *Vagrants of Venus*, *Mermen Of Mars*, *Misfits Of The Moon*, *Plundered On Pluto* and many more.

Now that many of Beemis' books are freely available it was felt by his estate that his unfinished work should also be given to the public. So here is the new Beemis we have all been waiting for.

MY heart was heavy as I drifted over the remote reaches of the Pacific Ocean in the atomic powered Zeppelin the World League of Peaceful Governments had thoughtfully allowed me to borrow in order to show their gratitude for my having ended the 4th World War several weeks ahead of time with my lucky discovery of a powerful ray that made gun powder ineffectual. This balloon cruise, as pleasant as it was, had been planned as more than just a dedicated scientific attempt to map the migratory routes of the Arctic Curlew. It was to have been, too, my wedding journey.

As I followed, with my binoculars, the happily paired curlews flapping to warmer climes I tried to think of some reason for the unpleasant turn events had taken. When I had called for my beloved Joanna on the prior morning her father, the noted munitions tycoon, John Plunderbund Brimstone, had left, not his best wishes for a safe honeymoon but, rather, orders for myself and my Zeppelin to be thrown unceremoniously from the grounds. All my leaden heart could be sure of was that I would never again walk hand in hand with the handsomest, most athletic and yet feminine, girl in the state of New Jersey. The thought of what I was doing

would have brought tears to my eyes had I not been as masculine and manly as I am. For the curlew was the one bird that my Joanna and I had always thought of as *our* bird.

But the rapid deflation of my Zeppelin vanquished all self pity from my mind. I was galvanized into action. Placing my binoculars back in their case, I dived without further thought from the gondola of the falling Zeppelin and into the placid waters of the Pacific Ocean. Perhaps some well placed parting shot from one of the minions of Joanna's father had done its slow work and been the cause of the untimely cessation of my means of transportation.

I am an excellent swimmer and so there was no dread on my part of the long swim ahead. However, I had barely covered a mile when I became aware that something was tugging rather forebodingly at my ankle. My impression was that I had caught my foot in the compelling maw of some great clam. Before I could reflect more the creature had pulled at me so forcefully that my head, the hair of which I wore in a somewhat long though manly fashion, was yanked below the breath stopping waters of the ocean in which I had so recently found myself. I fought bravely, being an excellent boxer. An old ring axiom has it that

Illustrated by SUMMERS



THE YES MEN OF VENUS

75

a good big man can beat a good little man. However, most rules of honest boxing were not made with giant clams in mind. For one thing, I could not be sure if I was fouling the creature or not. As I struggled I became more and more lightheaded and giddy. As I drove an excellent jab home to what I hoped was a vital spot of the clam I suddenly lost consciousness.

Chapter 2: The Mysterious Host

I CAME to in a clean white bed with a large handsome man looking down at me. He was a striking fellow. To give you some idea I will simply say that this man, whose name I soon learned was Lowell Hawthorne, was even better developed and more manfully handsome than myself.

"You've had a bit of a close shave, old man," he said, gripping my shoulder in a perfectly manly way.

"American, aren't you?"

"Right you are, old man," he said. "Mabu, my native boy and Numba, his native boy, fished you out of the briny. Scared the simple fellows a bit at first. They're not used to finding chaps such as yourself inside giant clams. I had some talking to do to convince them you weren't a large pearl or some such thing."

"I believe it is oysters rather than clams that are best known for their pearls," I said, good

naturedly, for I took to his handsome, though mysterious, American almost at once.

"Who can tell a native anything?" was his honest reply.

"I suppose I am to be laid up here for a time," I said.

"A few days," said Hawthorne, drawing a bamboo chair near to my side. "If you don't object I'd like to tell you a few of my adventures. For, if I do say so myself, my life has been both curious and strange."

"By all means," I encouraged, being anxious to learn more of this enigmatic man who apparently lived contentedly here among savages and giant clams.

"I can tell by your look," he began, "that you are a man of science and that you may at first be a bit skeptical. Let me begin by saying that for the past five years I have been in close radio contact with a man living inside the planet Venus."

"Inside?" I asked. "Come, Hawthorne. Science is well aware that people live on the outside of that damp junglous planet. But inside?"

"Put aside all your scientific learning for a moment," my new friend replied. "If you do you may learn something. At least you will have whiled away your convalescence."

So he began the odd and compelling narrative that you will read in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Down And Out On Mars

I AM the reincarnation, began Hawthorne, of an Egyptian priest, whose name if I were to mention it you would recognize as being as familiar to you as your own. Having lived several lives I reached this one with more than the usual sense of ennui. I tried many things, shopkeeping, the cavalry, gold prospecting, writing for the magazines. None of these helped, nor could love. For in ancient Egypt I had loved a handsome and sporting priestess named Isis. After her all other women were anticlimactic. As Fate would have it, she whom I sincerely and respectfully loved, never seemed to get reincarnated during the same era as myself. You know how women are about keeping appointments.

One evening toward the end of 1970 I was strolling through Central Park long after the hour when most men thought it safe. To a man such as myself, a man who fought the Red Indians without a qualm, the worst terrors of Central Park after dark held no dread. Still I was taken aback when seven youths fell upon me with baseball bats. You have perhaps found, as I did that night, that even a superb physical being is no match for seven men with little respect for the correct way of life, and large clubs. Though I maimed and injured a good number of them I

was nevertheless knocked unconscious.

When I awoke and took a step I bounced twelve feet into the air.

Some reappraisal of my surroundings seemed in order. Central Park had surely changed considerably. It was now a great red desert. I took another step and bounced again. Then the awesome truth came home to me. I was no longer in Central Park. I was on Mars.

I am aware that you scientifically inclined chaps talk of space travel as being a remote possibility. You will realize, of course, that in 1970 no such thing was even at the experimental stage. Therefore I knew I had been transported to the Red Planet by some mystical means there is no way to explain.

I was still engrossed in seeing how high I could bounce when three large green men rode toward me mounted on gigantic hairy horses that boasted two extra sets of legs. The green men themselves were twenty feet high and turned out to have, now that I noticed, an extra set of green arms. This is not the sort of sight someone who has only recently been battered with wooden clubs wishes to see on awakening.

But appearances are not always the best indication of the man and I soon found my green welcomers to be quite decent. By

means of a method too complex to burden you with we soon taught each other our respective languages.

The green men were named Yarl Zun, Zin Yerg and Yex Zurb. I explained to them that I had apparently transmigrated to Mars by some strange means.

"You picked a bad time to transmigrate," said Yarl Zun, shaking his great green head.

"Why is that?"

The three of them proceeded to explain to me as we shared a breakfast of kex, which is rather like our cold oatmeal, that Mars was in the midst of a great depression. It seems that the head of their government, the Daktor, who is roughly equivalent to two of our presidents, had been wooed into the camp of the more radical element in the Martian society and instead of listening to his Yax-Daktros, or well-wishers as we would call them, and building up comforting supplies of zugbeams, or what we would call deathrays, he had foolishly poured the taxpayers money into Yerb, which is something like our social security. The result was rampant radicalism and poverty with little or no respect for Goomba, roughly equal to our patriotism.

The upshot of this enlightening political indoctrination was that I would have a tough time making my way on Mars at the

moment. Zin Yerg and the rest helpfully offered to bat me over the head with Zoobs, roughly equivalent to our baseball bats, in the hope that I might then transmigrate back to Earth. I, though, having been an optimist in nine out of ten of my previous reincarnations, decided to brazen it out. Stick I would and albeit I was down and out at the moment I felt I would not be for long.

Such was indeed the case, as I will next relate.

Chapter 4: The Great Games Of Maroom

I THREW in my lot with the green men who were, it evolved, enroute to Maroom, the capital of this country, to enroll in the Great Games. It is difficult for me to find a parallel on our own planet for these Great Games. What transpired at them, as I was to learn only too well and shortly, was this. The blood-thirsty citizens of Maroom flock to a large stadium and there witness various fellows fighting one another and also great and ferocious beasts, of which there are many on this depression-torn planet. Should a poor mendicant triumph in one of these gruesome contests he is awarded a cash prize. This explains why the down-and-out of Mars flock to Maroom.

To Maroom then my new friends and I made our way. For

although on Mars I was now called Yar Sud, or Shortly, I still vowed that I would beat any man or beast I came up against in fair combat. Especially if there was money involved.

We had hardly reached the suburbs of the great and decadent capital when I heard a girl screaming in a tone that indicated her very honor was at stake. Borrowing a sword from Yex Zurb I jumped from my riding position just to the rear of his saddle and ran toward the scene of the struggle.

My green acquaintances had informed me that the green men were not the only race on Mars. There was also a pink skinned human type much like myself only taller. Still I was not prepared as I dived into the murky, sword-choked alley between two crumbling ruins to see before me a girl of striking beauty of figure being pummeled by a large pink man in a leather suit.

"One kiss is all I request," the man pleaded in a slimy voice that was far from manly.

"One will lead to another," the girl responded in a tone I admired. "Soon you will require other favors."

"One little kiss. By Zarg (their idea of God)! If you don't kiss me quickly, Dina Taurus, I will have you locked away where kissing is out of the question."

"Lock if you will," said the

brave girl. "For kiss you I never shall."

I waited to hear no more. "Stand, sir!" I cried. "The young lady does not wish to be kissed."

The man was nearly eight feet high, though it was evident that his pursuit of physical gratification left little room for a careful program of physical fitness. "Beat it, Yar Sud," he bellowed. "Do you dare to interfere with a Yax-Tarkas on his appointed rounds?"

"I don't know what a Yax-Tarkas is," I replied, "But I know that my blade will cut you down if you don't depart this woman's side at once."

His only reply was an angry grunt. He then came at me with sword drawn. In my student days in Paris I had astounded my teachers with my ability as a foilsman. Fortunately, on Mars they fence in the Parisian manner and I was soon able to run the pleasure bent Yax-Tarkas through and then dispose of his body in a pit beneath the ruins.

When I returned to the heavy breathing girl I suddenly gasped. "Isis!" I cried. For she, indeed, it was.

"My name is Dina Taurus," she replied. "I do thank you for aiding me. For your kind act, though, I fear you will incur the wrath of all Maroom."

"My own Isis," I continued. "Whom I have not seen for near-

ly two dozen reincarnations. Don't you remember me. Have you forgotten Egypt, my love?"

"You speak, sir, of love," the girl said in a tender voice. "I was about to bring up the topic myself. I feel somehow that even though you are shorter than most you are a man I could someday marry and kiss freely. I fear I have never met you before."

"Look, look," I said, beginning to draw a map of the solar system in the dust of the alley with the tip of my recently engorged sword. "Look there." I proceeded to explain where the planet Earth was in relation to Mars and then where Egypt had been. I told of our great love on that spot. "No wonder I haven't been able to find you again," I concluded. "You've been reincarnating here on another planet. Be that as it may, Isis, we are together again."

"As you talk and as I look at your handsome face it comes upon me more strongly that I am fond of you. Isis, however, I am not. Dina Taurus, a simple shopgirl, is who I am. As Dina Taurus I sincerely hope you will find your way clear to love me."

She was my own Isis and yet she had no recollection of it. I determined to court her under whatever name she was using. Once you have loved a woman such as Isis it is hard to shake the habit. "Dina Taurus you

shall be," I smiled. "Dina Taurus, I love you and ask your leave to pay court to you."

"My leave you have had since the moment you leaped into this fetid alley," she replied tenderly. "Tell me, by the way, what is your name?"

"My name is Lowell Hawthorne."

From behind us a grim voice spoke, "Lowell Hawthorne, we take you prisoner in the name of the City and County of Maroom."

A dozen heavily armed men had approached us quietly while we had talked of love. "What is the charge?"

"Killing a Yax-Tarkas and throwing him in a pit. Come along with us."

To my new found Dina Taurus I whispered, "Just what is a Yax-Tarkas, my love?"

"The talent agent for the Great Games," she gasped as the lawmen carted me away.

That is how I came to be sentenced to fight in the arena of Maroom.

Chapter 5: In The Dungeons

MY cellmate in the dark stone room under the arena was a handsome tanned man named Joel Lars. We soon became fast friends, not merely because we were padlocked together but because we shared a great community of interests and also be-

lieved in the manly virtues and a planned program of daily exercise.

"We will not be called into the arena for many days," Joel Lars told me.

"Unfortunate," I said." For I have only now remet a girl for whom I have searched many centuries on many worlds."

"Too bad," he replied with real sympathy. "Speaking of girls, would you care to hear my story?"

"It would help pass the dark hours here."

"It took place on Venus, which as you may know, is a planet in this system of ours."

"I am a great admirer of that planet," I said. "Please to continue."

"Of the overall surface of that planet I know little," went on Joel Lars. "Of its interior I know only too much. For it is there that the only woman I will ever love, Viri Yank, is at this moment a captive of the fiendish Yes Men of Venus."

"How does she happen to be inside Venus?" I asked.

"Let me go back a bit," said Joel Lars. "My parents were missionaries and one fine day they took their spaceship to Venus. Our crewmen proved dis-

loyal and in a dispute over shorter hours they threw my beloved parents and myself over the side. We were stranded in the steamy jungles and my parents soon succumbed to the moist living. I, a mere boy of seven, survived and was raised to manhood by the Boogdabs, what the Martians would call Yarznigs, roughly equivalent to the Earth's great apes."

"What of the cursed Yes Men and your dear Viri Yank?"

"Being raised by great apes has a strange effect on one," answered Joel Lars. "It took several years of therapy to completely rid me of the idea that I might be an ape myself. I still dream sometimes that my mother was. Now, as to the Yes Men."

His narrative was cut short at this point by the arrival of a group of guards who flung our cell open and pulled us to our feet. "There has been a last minute cancellation," one of them, a coarse hairy fellow, explained. "The star gladiator is ill and you two will have to go on in his place."

CLOSING NOTE: what transpired next would fill a book itself. And this is exactly what my agent has advised me to do with it.

THE END

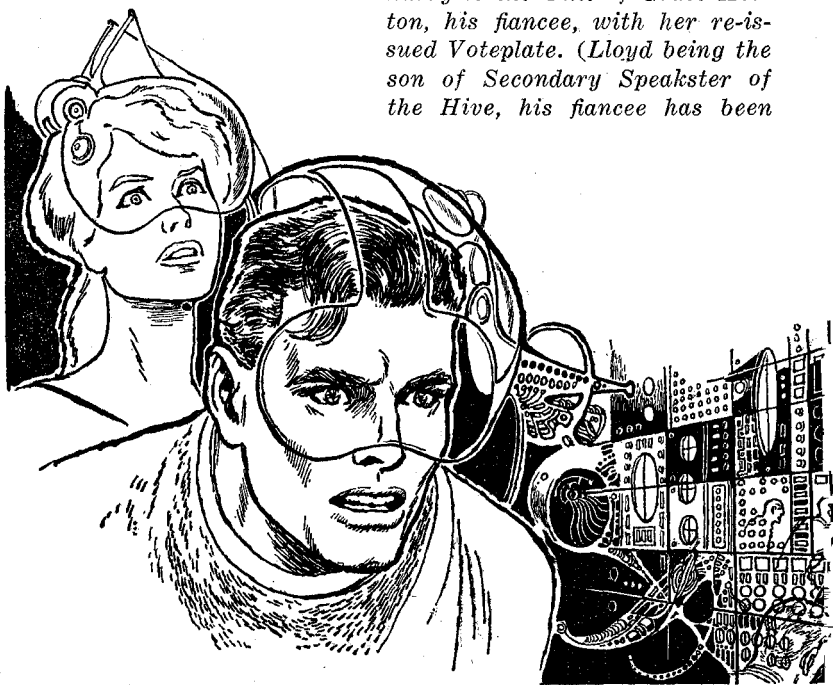
the PROGRAMMED PEOPLE

By JACK SHARKEY

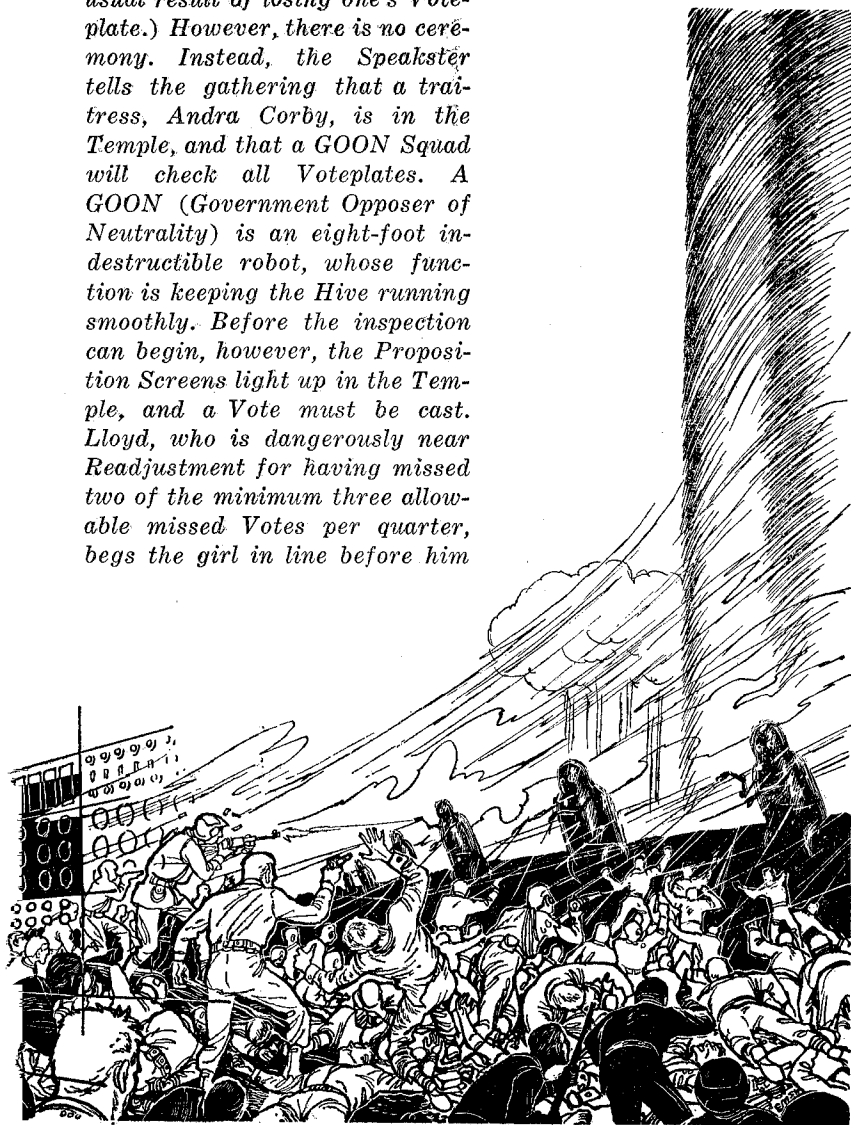
Conclusion

Synopsis of Part One

LLOYD BODGER, Junior, at his assigned service on Temple Day in the Hive (an enclosed hundred-level city of ten million people) is impatient for the Speakster to finish the politico-religious speech, so that he may hurry to the Unit of Grace Horton, his fiancée, with her re-issued Voteplate. (Lloyd being the son of Secondary Speakster of the Hive, his fiancée has been



privileged not to be sent to the hospital for Readjustment, the usual result of losing one's Voteplate.) However, there is no ceremony. Instead, the Speaker tells the gathering that a traitress, Andra Corby, is in the Temple, and that a GOON Squad will check all Voteplates. A GOON (Government Opposer of Neutrality) is an eight-foot indestructible robot, whose function is keeping the Hive running smoothly. Before the inspection can begin, however, the Proposition Screens light up in the Temple, and a Vote must be cast. Lloyd, who is dangerously near Readjustment for having missed two of the minimum three allowable missed Votes per quarter, begs the girl in line before him



for her place, in order to cast his Vote. When he has Voted, he finds that the girl is the traitress, Andra Corby; she shows him the scar on her arm from the wound for which she would not submit to Hospitalization. Out of the pity for her apparent terror of Hospitalization, he gives her Grace's Voteplate, enabling her to pass through the ensuing Goon inspection.

Meeting her outside, to get the plate back, he is told by Andra that there are no hospitals, that Readjustment, Hospitalization, and other terms are euphemisms for a trip down the incinerator chute, to keep Hive population at its status quo. He doesn't believe her, but when it is nearly time for Ultrablack (a negation of light, in which even a match-flame near the eyes could not be seen) to come on, he hasn't the heart to leave her to the mercy of the Goon patrols, so takes her to his top-level Unit.

Repercussions begin when Fredric Stanton, President of the Hive, and Prime Speaker, learns that Lloyd has brought a girl to his Unit, with an election coming up soon, a patent danger to the party in Hive society. Stanton orders Bodger, Senior, to have a talk with his son, before more damage to the party image can occur. Bodger, Senior, however, has a violent attack of illness— grounds for Read-

justment in a disease-free society— and has to take medicine from a hidden cache and lie down. Meanwhile, Grace Horton has been notified by Madge Benedict, Stanton's personal secretary, that she should not have attended the wrong Temple ceremony the night before. Grace, knowing Lloyd had her plate, pretends to be apologetic, then calls Lloyd to find out what he's been doing with her Voteplate. Lloyd and Andra go to Grace's Unit, and Andra tries to convince the two of them of the Hive's danger. Then the Vote tally of the night before comes in, and Stanton finds that Lloyd (who was too hasty to observe the Proposition) has voted con to a proposition demanding a pro Vote. He goes to Bodger, Senior, orders him to get Lloyd in line, or else! Bodger, Senior, feeling Grace should know about Lloyd, and hoping he can learn from her the source of his son's two derelictions, starts for her Unit.

In the Hive's film studios, Robert Lennick, the fiancée of Andra Corby, learns from Frank Shawn, his director, that Andra was seen escaping from the Temple with Bodger, Junior. Lennick and Shawn belonging, with Andra, to an underground resistance movement in the Hive, are upset to think she's connected with the authority they're trying

to overthrow. When Stanton— at the studio to play himself in a film about the Hive— is overheard talking to Madge Benedict by Frank, Frank decides on the strength of the information (Madge told Stanton that Lloyd was seen with Andra, the fugitive, and Stanton has figured out that Andra, not Grace, was the girl Lloyd was with at the Temple and subsequently in his Unit) to try and get to Andra, whom he now trusts, to warn her of Stanton's knowledge.

Bodger, arriving at Grace's, is tricked by Lloyd into admitting the truth: There are no hospitals, no readjustments, only death. Stanton arrives, and holds them at gunpoint, phoning Madge to have an emergency Ultrablack turned on, so that he won't be seen leading Bodger captive through the streets.

When Ultrablack comes on, however, this gives Frank the chance to show Lennick the most closely guarded secret of the underground movement: A false Goon, supposedly a movie prop, equipped with a viewscreen that will penetrate Ultrablack. Inside this prop-Goon, the two men go

out into Ultrablack toward Grace's Unit.

At Grace's, meantime, Bodger, Senior, tries to jump Stanton for the gun. Stanton fires the weapon — a Snapper, supposed to break a man's spine with his own muscle-contractions— and Bodger is not even hurt. He knocks Stanton cold, then collapses from his own fear, saying that his nervous system isn't human anymore. Before he loses consciousness, he tells Lloyd to go to the Brain beneath the Hive, and ask it "Why is the Hive—", then he passes out. The Goon Squad which Stanton had sent for, to guide them through Ultrablack, arrives. Lloyd uses Stanton's Voteplate to pose as the President, since the Goons cannot distinguish persons. He orders Madge Benedict held incommunicado, has some of the Goons take Grace and his father to the Bodger Unit, where he hopes Grace can locate Bodger's medicine, and then— leaving Stanton unconscious— he and Andra are escorted by the remaining Goon down toward the great Brain, hoping to find out the truth behind the Hive.

THE Presidential election of 1972 brought a landslide of votes for the Democratic candidate, Lester Murdock. The Republican candidate, Neal Ten

Eyck, demanded a recount of the votes, as was by then the custom of the loser in an election. Ten Eyck's request was, however, not granted, due to a certain plank in

Murdock's political platform. Murdock's prime contention was for a return to Real Democracy, a thing possible among such a widely scattered population because of the enormous advances in electronic communications. Murdock insisted that his vote-by-machine plank must have its chance to be put into effect, first, and then Ten Eyck could have his recount, one which could not be further gainsaid.

The country was strongly behind Murdock in his insistence on this point, all the thoughtful voters being oversaturated with what news agencies referred to as the "crybaby" attitude of political losers. In vain did Ten Eyck protest the plan.

"It will not be a recount," he deplored, in a nationwide television speech. "It will be a brand-new election, involving me, the candidate who has had no chance to perform, and Mr. Murdock, the candidate who will already have fulfilled a major campaign promise!" Ten Eyck's words went unheeded, as he had gloomily suspected they would, and all across the nation, automatic vote-machines were installed, to the amount of one machine per hundred citizens. When a disgruntled Ten Eyck refused outright to even have his name flashed on the ballot-screens, Murdock changed the initiation of the new machines to a simple

Vote-of-Confidence Ballot, and received a ninety percent return, ten percent being either undecided or abstaining. Ten Eyck, shortly afterward, resigned from politics and retired to a ranch in the Pacific Northwest, to write his memoirs. A severe electrical storm in that area set fire to the house when he was just short of completing his manuscript, and every last page was destroyed. Ten Eyck himself was away at the time, and declared, in an interview with reporters just outside the blazing house to which he had returned on hearing of the disaster, that he was also retiring from the field of literature.

News of the storm and fire only became more support for a secondary plank in Murdock's platform, weather control. He was glad of the opportunity the fire had given him to move smoothly into this next facet of national development, and his intimates informed newsmen—not for publication—that Murdock was secretly glad to have his program "rise like a phoenix from Ten Eyck's fire."

This phase of his three-plank platform proved quite troublesome. The most learned scientists of the world informed him that weather could, indeed, be influenced by the detonation of nuclear weapons in strategic locales, but so far, the influence

was all to the bad. The three new radiation belts developed since 1961 were doing unexpected things to the balance of the ionosphere, and this in turn was affecting the jet streams high in the atmosphere, with a consequent unpredictability as to prevailing movements of large air masses over the globe. In short, the weather had become prankish, balky, and not a little ferocious in parts, with longer, colder winters, manic-depressive summers, and a gradual disappearance of the spring and fall seasons altogether. Ordinary grounding devices, such as lightning rods in rural areas, were no longer sufficient conductors for the wild electrical potentials building up in air and soil, because of the increased activity of free electrons in the atmosphere. A mild storm did not exist, anymore. The norm had become intense blankets of snow, or torrents of rain, and a continued rise in wind velocities and destruction by lightning.

THE time has come," Murdock therefore addressed the nation in his State-of-the-Union speech, "to stop talking about the weather, and *do* something about it!" What he proposed doing, in view of the scientists' disclaimer to be able to control, even slightly, the crescendoing perils of wind and water, was to

develop a form of housing that would be impervious to the weather. "When there are too many flies to swat," he said, in his famous concluding line, "you put up windowscreens!"

Forthwith, every physical scientist in the country began work on the project, the prize being—not the usual medal of commendation and Presidential handshake; Murdock knew people better than that—one million dollars, tax-free. Within six months, Leonard Surbo, a laboratory technician at DuPont, had discovered a method of uniting the helium and oxygen atoms in a continuous chain, by means of super-induced valence, in which the solitary two electrons of the helium atom were joined into the minus-two gaps in two adjoining oxygen atoms, the other gap in each oxygen ring being filled with one electron from adjoining helium atoms, and so on, literally *ad infinitum*. This new compound, Helox, was found to be veritably unbreakable, yet weighed one-sixth less than magnesium, its nearest strength-plus-lightness competitor. There was some haggling from DuPont as to whether Surbo, who had, after all, used their facilities in his search for the new compound, should receive the million dollars. This was ameliorated nicely by President Murdock, who promised them, in lieu of the lost

million, the billion-dollar government contract to put Helox into full-scale production, which DuPont gladly accepted.

Here again Murdock's program ran into a snag. The delicate processing required to produce Helox put the final cost of the compound at a rate-per-ounce only less than that of pure platinum; the average citizen, indeed, the above-average citizen, would be hard-pressed to afford so much as a windowsill's worth, let alone a complete dwelling.

Murdock called his advisory staff together for an emergency session immediately. They remained *in camera* with the President for three days, meals being sent in from outside. At the end of this time, Murdock emerged from the conference room with a three-day stubble flanking his best successful smile, and—after being cleaned up for public exposition—appeared once more on television with his radical Common-Wall Program.

The gist of it was this: A man in a one-room house needed four walls. Two men, in two one-room houses, needed but seven, if the common wall were shared. Four needed but twelve, and so on. Each time, the amount needed per individual decreased, as more men were included in the building program. What Murdock planned, therefore, was the erec-

tion of—not a mere housing development—but an entire city of Helox. It would be a closed unit, one which would serve all man's needs, self-lighted, self-darkening, air-conditioned, and equipped with the newest air-water-mineral reclaiming devices which could be used in the manufacture of synthetic food-stuffs for the people of the city.

THE enormous expense of such an undertaking was put to a Congressional vote, and roundly vetoed. Murdock, not to be swung from his determined path, had the motion put to a direct vote by the American people, via the vote-machines. This time, he received a ninety-five percent vote, all votes in favor of the new indestructible city. For the first time, members of Congress realized that their power in the land was standing on legs of gelatin, and an emergency session was called, to determine whether or not Murdock's actions called for impeachment.

Murdock attended the meeting, and waited until all the complaints and recriminations had been voiced. And then he put it to the Congress: What need had a Real Democracy of representation at all, when each citizen could vote directly on all governmental proposals? He terrified them at the thought of putting such a proposal to the people

immediately, when their removal from office was so certain. Then, when every face in the assembly was pale with apprehension, the familiar fatherly smile overrode Murdock's features, and he offered them all, at the end of their term, a permanent retirement plan, at full salary, for each of them, and for their subsequent first-born lineal descendants. Congress, knowing when it was licked— and not much disliking the prospect of eternal security— voted in favor of his plan, with the one stipulation that such income should be forever tax-free, a codicil to which Murdock smilingly ascribed.

Production began soon afterwards, on Murdock's indestructible city. It was to hold a maximum of ten million people, one hundred tiers of humanity in all the comfort and safety the mind of man could devise. And again, a snag delayed the plan of Lester Murdock. It proved, however, to be a minor one: With each Level of the city to be constructed to a minimum height of fifty feet (any lower would impair the efficiency of the air-conditioning), the total height would be nearly one mile. At such ghastly distances above the earth, the workmen would need specially heated clothing, oxygen equipment, superior safety-belts for themselves and their gear, miles of

roads and parking facilities to make their getting to and from the job possible in a minimum of wasted time— A hundred troublesome details, all of which would serve to impede progress tremendously.

MURDOCK, after much thought, was equal to the problem. The city, he stated, would be built in ten parts, no one part, therefore, being more than five hundred feet high. Then, when all sections were completed, they would be *flown* to a common site, stacked like flapjacks, and the necessary inter-sectional connections made for the water and electrical conduits, elevators, and the like. The light weight of each section made such a plan almost feasible, except that it would necessitate the loss of nearly one complete level to house the vast rockets which would do the moving. Murdock and his staff conferred, and then found that, with a slight change in the blueprints, the intended million-per-section of people could still be housed, central rocket-section or not, by the addition of a very few extra feet of radius to the ten-level sections. His plan was endorsed by the engineers when it was found that such an extension brought the overall dimension of the section into accordance with the necessary lift-surface areas for the proposed flying city.

THAT the city would take its well-earned place among the wonders of the world, Murdock had no doubt; that he would still be in office at the time of its completion was extremely unlikely, since, even at maximum speeds of construction, it would be impossible to do it in less than twenty-five years. There was nothing to do but put it to a vote of all the people.

Murdock worded his proposition, however, with the canny instinct for outguessing human nature which had brought him to his present estate: While supposedly stressing the fact that a continuing Presidential program even after the man was out of office was unprecedented, he actually made it known by his phrasing of the proposition that such an extension would divide the contingent tax-bite per citizen into twenty-five painless morsels, rather than the four rather large gulps they would have had to swallow during his tenure.

Political savants say that it was this latter point which strongly influenced the resounding pro-vote from the people. Be this as it may, work on the incomparable city was begun. Once the program had been inaugurated, the thing was out of Murdock's hands, and he began working upon his third plank at once.

Neutrality had become the bugbear of political ambition by 1968. The collapse of the John Birch movement in 1965, during the nationwide riots which sprang up during that bloody year, had still not removed one of the foremost contentions of that organization, to wit: One must either be *pro-American* or *anti*. The idea of any citizen being indifferent to the success or failure of a government proposal was distasteful to the masses, and this feeling grew in intensity up until the year of Murdock's election. It is said that this was the prime factor in his being elected, that he declared an end to "wishy-washy Americanism, once and for all". Very shortly after the beginning of work on the indestructible city, therefore, Murdock put the following proposition to a vote:

"Proposed: That political apathy be put to an end by means of the removal of the 'Undecided' element in the national vote, by demanding that each citizen miss no more than three votes in any quarter of the year, or have his voting privilege revoked until such time as he be declared, by competent authority, of a more civic-minded turn of inclination."

This poll was not as sweeping as one as those formerly called for by the President. It split at approximately seventy-to-thirty

percent, in favor of the proposition. The salient fact that such a vote was patently unfair to the people whom it would most directly influence—the nonvoters—seemed to escape everybody. And so the proposition became a bill, and was duly appended to the Constitution of the United States, becoming Article XXVIII.

All voting machines in the country were forthwith modified to allow only a vote of *pro* or *con* to be registered. Murdock's promised platform was on its way to completion, and the old gentleman settled back for a restful remainder of his tenure, thinking up approaches to the public fancy in the upcoming election of 1976. This being the bicentennial anniversary of the founding of the country, he toyed with ideas of a simple wave-the-flag, rah-rah-rah, Cornwallis - to - Khrushchev - victory sort of campaign that would stun the sensibilities of the simple-minded, and dim the doubts of country-loving thinkers. He was in the process of drawing up such a campaign, and had just placed a question mark in parentheses after the words "Fireworks at the Rally" when his unexpected and fatal cerebral hemorrhage caught him in mid-pen-stroke, and Lester Murdock fell dead across his desk.

WILEY CONNORS, the vice-President, after being duly sworn into office, scrapped all of Murdock's plans and began building his own political platform for the election of 1976, barely a year off. He thought it was time once again to hit the older voters—geriatrics was doing wonders for longevity since the new drug, Protinose, made possible the stimulation of new growth of active cells in liver, kidneys, and pancreas—where they lived: Free medical care. It had failed in the past, but at that time there were not enough old voters to carry it. Now, with no Congressional meddling (the Senators and House members who were still in office considered the job a sinecure), and the vote-machines making a genuine voice-of-the-people possible, it might keep the tide flowing toward the Democratic Party in the upcoming fall.

At this time, Lloyd Bodger, who had been Speaker of the House during Murdock's tenure, and was now Vice President of the country, was stricken in his office by an onslaught of what was first diagnosed as a perforated ulcer, but on the operating table was discovered to be duodenal cancer. The extensive inroads of the malignancy made its removal impossible without terminating the life of the patient, so a new method of treat-

ment was attempted. A length of heavy lead foil, plastic-coated, and impregnated with radium, was wound about the infested area and the incision was closed. In theory, while the lead foil shielded Bodger's organs from the radium, the radium could bathe the malignant cells alone in its deadly emanations. This method, heretofore theorized but never tried, was the last hope of saving Bodger's life. In three weeks, at which time the malignancy should be gone, Bodger underwent surgery once more for the removal of the foil. The malignancy, it was found, had vanished as hoped, but an unexpected development had occurred. In some manner, the cell structure of Bodger's spleen and pancreas had been affected by the irradiation to the extent that the blood cells and insulin respectively formed by these organs were abnormal.

The iron in the hemoglobin was found to be radioactive to the ratio of one part in five million, and on the increase, while the insulin was contaminated with a change of the carbon atom in the molecule to Carbon-14, the two developments making a high concentration of radiation near the thoracic cavity, a slight rise in which could prove fatal.

Bodger was put on a special diet which included a daily intake of five hundred cubic centi-

meters of cadmium-gel, the doctors hoping that the radiation-absorption of the cadmium would keep physical deterioration to a minimum. The best prognosis they could agree upon for Bodger, however, was six more months of life.

Before the predicted period ended, though, Bodger insisted he felt improved, and wished to return to his job. Permission was granted provisionally: Just one sign of radiation sickness and Bodger was to be replaced as Vice President, and to submit himself to medical care in a sanatorium for the time left to him. Bodger agreed to this, and was released. In six months' time, with the fall election just over the horizon, he was again reexamined, and a startling fact came to light: The incision from the two previous operations had healed without a scar, and Bodger was found to be in a better state of health than most of his doctors. Whatever property in the ferric emanations was able to cause the death of body tissue was not doing it; instead, it was destroying only those chemical compounds which inhibit, retard, or prevent proper cellular functioning. In effect, Bodger's body— not unlike vacuum-wrapped radiated foodstuffs— was incorruptible. He would never grow older.

ON learning this news, Bodger made a request of the President. He wanted Wiley Connors to put him in charge of the still-incomplete city-building project, postulating that an incorruptible man was the likely one to see the project completed. While agreeing to some extent, Connors counter-stipulated that Bodger be second-in-command, and that he be forbidden, by law, to ever take higher office, lest he become overcome by the magnitude of his power in the city. Bodger readily agreed, stating that he'd just as soon be under the head of the city, since "no one ever tries assassinating a vice-president".

By September of that year, then, Bodger was fully in charge of the city, which the workers had humorously dubbed "The Hive", because of its proposed final shape, multitude of inner cells, and the vast population-to-be. That fall, Wiley Connors was elected by an overwhelming majority, and put his medical-care plan into immediate effect.

The years between then and the year 2000, the time-of-completion year for the Hive, were uneventful in import, but unsettling in degree. The weather was now the primal topic of conversation everywhere. During the intervening five Presidential terms (Wiley Connors had successfully campaigned for a sec-

ond term on the strength of the popularity of his free medical care program), the government was forced to clamp down on newscasts of storm disasters, lest a national panic be started. This was feasible only if the damage were to minor rural areas; news stories of items like the destruction of Kansas City by lightning, in 1987, were impossible to suppress. As a direct result of this appalling disaster, a successful international nuclear-test ban was agreed upon, the first real progress in that area since the late nineteen-forties. Whether this major cooperative decision had come too late remained to be seen.

It was during the term of President Andrew Barnaby, just before the election of 2000, that the Hive was completed. The newsreel shots of the ten flying city-sections were the most thoroughly viewed of any prior television programs, including the four unsuccessful moon-shots in the attempt, early in the eighties, to build a lunar city. The site of the city's permanent location was a plateau high in the Rockies, at a point a few hundred miles south-by-southeast of Seattle. The reason for the choice of site was the location of the world's largest mechanical brain at that point; the running of the million-and-one functional parts of the Hive could not be left to the

uncertainties of a human agency. It would have required the full time of a tenth of the population of the Hive to keep its multitude of lights, elevators, communication-systems, synthesizers, air-conditioners, and power units in coordinated operation. The job of running the Hive was turned over to the Brain, completely.

THAT any damage could occur to the Brain was impossible, President Barnaby pointed out to the nation during the gala inauguration ceremonies of the indestructible city. When the threat of nuclear war still hung over the world, he told his listeners, the Brain was prudently constructed in the heart of the mountain on which the Hive now rests, its entrance being protected by a ceiling twenty-five feet thick, of concrete and lead, which could close hermetically tight and successfully block any power in possession of civilized man. Further, the Brain was self-sustaining, needed no maintenance, and possessed enough electronic memory-cells to record a complete history of mankind for a millennium to come.

The ceremonies completed, and Lloyd Bodger installed as second-in-command to a city that as yet had no first-in-command, but one thing remained to be done: Populate the city. And here

again, the dream of Lester Murdock ran into an unexpected snag: The first million people selected to dwell in the Hive were hospitalized in a week's time, due to a mass outbreak of what the nation's foremost doctors diagnosed as a combination of claustrophobia and anthropobia, a sort of panic at the thought of being sealed into something with a vast throng of people. In vain did Bodger and Barnaby try to point out the benefits of the Hive: It was never too hot, never too cold, spacious, airy, bright, and a strong element of ultraviolet in the lighting made the breeding of disease germs impossible. It was a paradise of scientific achievements; anybody should be happy to live there.

Both men being persuasive to the extreme, another wave of determined urbanites was installed in the Hive, people specially selected for their acute mental balance, plus an emotional tendency toward seclusiveness. The result, while it took a month to develop this time, was the same. The United States apparently had a multi-billion-dollar white elephant on its hands. Even Barnaby, in one last attempt to sway the public, taking them on a televised tour of the wondrous city, was taken by a sudden spasm of fright, and dropped his hand-microphone from fingers that trembled violently. His shouted

groan to his guards, "Get me out! Get me *out* of here—!" had a devastating adverse effect on the public psychology, and Barnaby— smart enough to know that the unthinking public would blame him personally for Murdock's program— tactfully withdrew his name from the ballot for the upcoming election, in order that his party might have a fighting chance to win. The city of Helox, the magnificent Hive, seemed doomed to lie untenanted high in the mountains until the crack of doom.

And then Bodger— who alone was unaffected by the Hive, perhaps due to his ingrained *rapport* with things which were destined to live forever— thought of children. "Why not," he begged the American people in a telecast which was Barnaby's last official concession to the development of the Hive, "let me have the orphans, the unwanted children of the nation! A child's psychology cries out for what the Hive can offer. Freedom from adult supervision, the chance to blend with a group conformity, all the while having the secure feelings of guaranteed food and shelter." The ensuing Vote was split almost directly down the middle; not enough to carry the proposition, yet not enough to quell it. The difficulty became apparent when a mass gathering of educators converged on Wash-

ington, bitterly protesting Bodger's plan. The nub was that no provision had been made for the children's minds; nor, they insisted, *could* be, since the Hive's peculiar effect on adults precluded the presence of teachers. And commuting to an exterior locale for schooling was defeating the whole scheme of the Hive: self-sufficiency.

IF that is the sole objection," Bodger informed the leaders of this group, "it can be overcome with ease. Have you all forgotten the gigantic pool of knowledge encased in the Brain beneath the Hive, more knowledge than any three of you possess in concert? Schooling can be direct from the Brain, tapping its near-endless informational resources."

The educators, partially won over, still insisted that such a plan removed the personal touch from education. The individual child would not be able to question the Brain when things proved too difficult for comprehension, nor would there be opportunity for after-school meetings with teachers for discussion of individual difficulties.

"But we will *have* teachers," said Bodger. "Robots, each one able to tap the Brain for information, yet each a separate individual, able to cope with the children one by one."

If such a thing were possible, the educators said after consultation among themselves, they would endorse his program. Bodger thanked them, and immediately polled the scattered manufacturers of simple household robots to see if such an electronic educator might be constructed. Until that date, robotics was a minor line of business, there being little demand for anything in the robot-line more complex than a story-teller, or automatic floor-cleaner, or traffic-director. Bodger, stressing the great number of such creatures necessary in the Hive, prevailed upon these individual manufacturers to produce a robot that could combine all the essential features of a teacher: Mobility, loquacity, authority, and impressive personal appearance. These were achieved easily, by the respective use of wheels, speakers, abnormal height, and then the addition of telelensic "eyes", flexible metal "arms", and a non-functional, but esthetically necessary "neck" beneath the eye-bearing section, to prevent the robots' looking like ambulant bank-vaults. In a year's time (during which Barnaby's party won the election by a narrow margin, putting Malcom Frade into office), the robots were duly built, conveyed to the Hive, and their controls coordinated with the direction-centers of the Brain,

and a record five million children, either orphans, children of parents who thought this would better their offsprings' lives, or just plain unwanted children, were brought to, and settled comfortably into Units of, the Hive. The educators, however, demanded that a one-year trial period be given the Hive as an in-living school system, at the end of which time the children would each be tested at the educational level of their current ages to determine whether or not Bodger's program was a success.

When the year was half-over, however, a new and extremely necessary scientific discovery made abrupt mockery of the very existence of the Hive. A simply-generated protective forcefield was invented by the technical staff at General Motors, one which would enable every person in the world to own a weather-, wind-, bomb- or anything-else-proof home.

Helox stocks, which had been unsteady since the first failure at tenancing the Hive, nosedived into oblivion, and wiped out the fortunes of a great many people. Angry and vengeful meetings were held shortly afterward, across the nation, and a national vote was called for to determine whether "our children should be held veritable prisoners in a structure whose uses are already archaic!"

WHEN President Frade, an unexcitable man, logically refused to take action against a government project whose failure might completely undermine an already shaky confidence in his, or any, administration, mobs were formed, and great numbers of people converged from all points of the continental United States to put a stop to the Hive. The leaders of the growing army of angry citizens had more sense than to attack the Hive itself; Helox, unpopular or not, was already in use nationally in an expensive series of ashtrays, pocket combs, and other small items, and was known, by general experience, to be as indestructible as had been claimed by its proponents. They would strike, instead, at the robots who taught the children. "When they're all gone bust," one of the rabble-rousers cried to his impromptu constituency, "Bodger'll *have* to let the kids go. He can't keep 'em there if they don't get no learning!"

The lowest level of the Hive, of course, was readily accessible, by a multitude of air-lock type entrances, or populating its vast interior would have taken incredible lengths of time. Bodger, alerted by Frade of the oncoming mobs (aside from a direct line to Washington, there was no contact between Hive inmates and the outer world), who were too

great in number for the militia to control without actually destroying the misguided people, begged for the use of a strictly military weapon of the time, Feargas, to drive the mobs away. Frade, being dubious as to the advisability of giving the nation's best weapon into the hands of so desperate a man, insisted that the gas be installed, instead, into the robots themselves, to put its use at the discretion of the mechanical Brain, not Bodger's.

Bodger pleaded that such a move, while salutary, would take too much time. Mobs were already reported within a few miles of the mountain region at which the Hive stood. He demanded that paratroops armed with the gas be dropped near the Hive at once, or he would take desperate steps. Frade refused to contemplate such a deployment of troops in such shaky international times. Altercations in the UN were rising in bitterness, and the country had to be constantly on its guard. Its military manpower must be used in defense of its shores, not for such "petty intramural squabbles". Frade further suggested that Bodger put his synthesizers to work on the manufacture of the gas; he could not be bothered further with the problem, being already overdue to attend a meeting of the UN General As-

sembly, to speak words of encouragement against the dangerous rumblings in the Far East. Bodger, insisting on his rights, found himself speaking into a dead phone. Re-dialling brought the enraging information that the President had already left the White House and was not available for the rest of the afternoon.

Bodger immediately left his office in the top level of the Hive and descended directly to the barracks of the robot-teachers in Sub-Level One, thence through the lead-concrete level to the Brain-control chamber, where he put his problem, via the automatic coding-keyboard, to the Brain itself. Its answer came immediately: A step-up of the robots' disciplinary powers.

IN lieu of a hickory switch, or yardstick—either one a decided menace to life in powerful metal hands—the robot-teachers were equipped with mild sonic beams which could jog the most torpid student into instant and quaking attention, by creating a powerful muscle-spasm throughout the body. These vibratory flagella had a maximum-time limit of one-fifth of a second; longer playing of the beam would be dangerous in the extreme. The Brain suggested that, for the duration of the emergency, the robots be given full scope

of this beam. Bodger agreed conditionally: While a phalanx of robots held off the mobs with the beam, the remainder of them should be equipped with Feargas nozzles and the newly developed forcefield, to preclude any further incidents of anti-Hive movements from cropping up this way.

The Brain instantly revoked limitation-orders regarding the sonic-beams, set in motion the manufacturing and synthesizing forces which would produce the field and the gas jets on the bodies of those robots not sent to participate in the oncoming battle outside the Hive, and then, when the single phalanx had gone out to meet the approaching mass of angry humanity, sealed over every entrance to the Hive with tight-fitting partitions of pure Helox.

That this should have been the same day on which global hostility reached its peak was unforeseeable; the fact remains, however, that—forty-five minutes after the sealing of the Hive, at a time when the mobs and the beam-flashing robots were just meeting in brutal conflict—an international nuclear war of one hour's duration broke out, and at the end of that time, the only life remaining on the face of the Earth was that within the Hive, the rest of the planet being bathed in smoke, fire, and

the cold flames of deadly radiation. When Bodger had returned to his office to view the battle outside through his private tele-screen, where robots and mankind had met, on the scorched plateau outside the city walls, could only be discerned a pitifully few random mounds of molten slag and smoldering cinders. The Brain, seeing the devastation through the same circuits that brought the scene to Bodger's eyes, knew at once that President Frade must have perished in the holocaust, which meant that the Hive no longer possessed a first-in-command to act as a balance against Bodger's rule. It flashed on the proposition screens a demand for an immediate election of a new President, to be selected from the inmates of the Hive.

And the screens went blank as the Brain's circuits rejected the proposal: No one in the Hive was the necessary thirty-five years of age. The Brain, arguing with its own circuits, then declared that, to obviate any longer wait than necessary for a President, the first inmate to achieve the age of thirty-five would be elected by automatic default of the others. Bodger, trying in vain to give orders to the Brain from his office, descended in the lift to discover that the great lead-concrete barrier was closed, and the Brain-control chamber was out of

reach of any human agency.

He, and the five million children in the Hive, were its prisoners for—the eldest children admitted being in their tenth year—a quarter of a century.

LATE in 2026, on November 12th, his thirty-fifth birthday, Fredric Stanton was elected President of the Hive. By now, the Hive's population was nearly at the ten million mark, most of the children marrying in their late teens. In order to have the weddings properly performed, the Brain had sent crews of robots to modify the ancient rocket engines on the fifth level of each section, turning the firing chamber into a vast temple, and the enormous thrust-tubes into long arcades by means of which the inmates of each sector could enter and leave. A modification of the robot-teacher, modeled on the Brain's inbuilt memories of church hierarchies, was built into the base of the central dais of each temple, a plan further designed to combine the citizens' need to worship with their love of country, thereby making treason not only illegal, but immoral, in the people's emotions. On the day of Stanton's inauguration, the secondary sub-level gaped wide once more, permitting the new President to familiarize himself with the entire setup of the Hive.

Lloyd Bodger, being a sensible man, did not protest this election. His twenty-five year impotency to command had nearly maddened him, and he saw that only so long as there was a President would he have any say—so whatsoever in matters of government in the Hive. Some of Stanton's propositions, in the subsequent four years of his first term, were not to Bodger's liking, but he was unable to fight against the Vote of the Kinsmen (a Stanton-suggested title, since the flavor of the word held more unity than simply "citizen", and was analogous, besides, to the close-knit status of the Hive's inmates), especially when such Votes were initially stimulated into *pro*-votes by Stanton's control of the Temple Speaksters.

By now, of course, memory of life outside the Hive was a dim phantasm to most of the inmates, and the idea of living anywhere else would have appalled them. The robots did all the heavy labor, patrolled the streets in super-efficient anti-crime campaigns, and possessed enough knowledge—via the Brain—to make a lot of fact-learning superfluous. The one insuperable problem was population. Stanton knew that ten million was the ultimate amount the Brain-controlled Hive could care for with maximum efficiency. Yet the disease-controlled nature of

the Hive made normal life-expectancy far higher than at any time in man's history. Something had to be done.

To this end, Stanton did not wish to consult the Brain. He knew too well its Gordian-knot methods of solving problems. It might simply make it law that no one be allowed to live beyond a certain age, and Stanton was—save for Bodger—the oldest person in the Hive. So he swallowed his natural distrust of the second-in-command, and asked his help in finding a means to control the situation.

There was, at that time, a central hospital in the Hive, located on the fiftieth and fifty-first levels. Bodger, not wishing to formulate a law that might be detrimental to any particular Kinsman's status in the Hive, decided that the best method of "unnatural selection" should be one involving an area of chance: Sick or injured people would be taken to new hospitals built *outside* the Hive (ostensibly to obviate the dangers of contagion). The radiation count was still deadly enough out there to destroy any such unfortunates for the next thirty years, but the Kinsmen need not be told this. It was cruel, but—until life outside the Hive was once again possible—it was the only way of preserving the lives of the ten million the Hive could accommodate.

IT'S murderous," Bodger told Stanton, "and I hate being the man to set it up. But—I'm like the captain of a ship, having to destroy the lives of some in order to make rescue possible for the others. It must be done, and—though I abhor this cruel means—I can see no other way."

The measure was put into effect, and worked well for a span of three years. Then certain members of the populace began to question the non-return of hospitalized Kinsmen, and Stanton, after a hot argument with Bodger, put through his Readjustment Bill, proclaiming that any act of treason against the Hive would result in hospitalization for the agitator, in which psychotherapy might restore his sense of values. In short: Anyone who said a word against the hospitals would be sent there.

Open resistance ceased the same day the bill was passed.

It was shortly after this time that Bodger—in his nineties, actually, but possessing the health and appearance of a greying forty-year-old—fell in love with his personal secretary, Miss Patricia Arland, and was married to her in a private ceremony before President Stanton—Bodger did not like the Speaksters, which were, after all, only Stanton-via-machine, and had insisted on eliminating "the middle-robot"—and in a year's time she

bore him a son, Lloyd Bodger, Junior, in Bodger's private Unit, since he stated (solely for the Kinsmen's benefit) that the child had arrived unexpectedly, and his wife had been unable to make the trip to the outlying maternity wing of the exterior hospitals.

For obvious reasons, it had been impossible to have a maternity hospital in which all the patients perished; the "wing" of the main hospital was, in actuality, the only genuinely functioning part of that structure, and was sealed off against the still-rampant radiation. (The entire staff there was robotic, of course.) Bodger however, did not trust Stanton to the extent of leaving his wife and forthcoming child in the hands of Stanton's metallic minions, hence his decision to have his wife bear their firstborn child at home, a decision that—due to lack of proper medical equipment in the Unit—cost her her life. Bodger, not quite irrationally, blamed Stanton for the loss of his wife, and their relationship thenceforth—never on a good basis—sundered abruptly into a strictly-business proposition.

The heart had gone out of Bodger, however, with the death of his wife, and Stanton found he could allow the old man much more latitude than he'd have formerly dared, even to the extent

of allowing him the newly created job of Secondary Speakster, to take the more humdrum phases of that task out of Stanton's hands.

Other of Stanton's bills were proposed and adopted without any more protest from Bodger, who devoted himself almost entirely to the upbringing of his son. The draft bill (to help fight an imaginary war), the marriage-by-twenty-five bill, the designated-areas bill— These and others were put to a Vote, and always carried. Stanton was supreme ruler of the Hive.

The one thing he could not delete from the Brain— to his eternal frustration— was the four-year tenure of the Presidential office. Nor could he sway the Brain's insistence on a maximum of two terms for a man. The only hope for him lay in the Brain's utter disregard of time, a factor hard to root out in a thinking apparatus which was virtually timeless. Stanton therefore declared that henceforth, a "Presidential year" should be a total of five trips of the Earth around the sun. The Brain, not seeing what possible difference this could make, so long as the letter of Article XXII was observed, ratified his proposition, and Stanton— on his second election — had a cozy twenty-year term stretching out before him. In that space of time, he hoped to

circumvent, somehow, the inflexible attitude of the Brain toward the hope of his third term.

BY the tenth actual year of his second term, radiation in the area had decreased greatly (the mountainous areas had been least affected by the nuclear war), and Stanton dreamed up an innovation to Hive-living that might stem the sensed-but-not-overt atmosphere of discontent among the Kinsmen toward the administration: Tourgyros.

These flying ships would take the Kinsmen soaring out of the Hive, flying above a carefully prepared route that would show them nothing but green valleys, blue skies, and of course the "main hospital", from high enough in the air to preclude their noting it was an empty shell. (Patients had not been taken there to die for years, since the slow lessening of radiation had become apparent; they were fed directly to the disrupting incinerators, to provide fodder for the synthesizers.) This squelched quite a large number of rumor-mongers, and the Hive buzzed with peaceful tranquility for nearly a decade, since the Hive-raised Kinsmen found themselves just as uneasy in the wide-open outdoors as their forebears had been in the celled confines of the Hive.

Then, in 2026, between the hours of five and six-thirty P.M. on the second day of June, an untoward event occurred: All power to the Hive was cut off for that crucial hour-and-a-half, due to an error on the part of Fredric Stanton. In the Brain-control chamber, just after asking the Brain itself to solve the problem of the means by which he could be reelected (a device to which he found himself reduced after nearly two decades of futile scheming), he slipped from the chair before the control panel, and tore loose the wiring leading to the encephalographic metal band upon his head. The Brain, sending information to a point to which it was no longer connected, created a synaptic syndrome in itself, and flared with enough power to throw every circuit-breaker in its cubic miles of wiring. Instantly, the robots ceased walking the streets, the lifts jammed to a halt, and Light-of-Day flickered and went out, being replaced by, not power-generated Ultrablack, but simple inter-Hive darkness.

The reason that period was crucial was that Jacob Corby was just at that moment about to be dropped into the maw of the incinerator chute. When blackness fell, and his robot-captors went slack-jointed and limp, he made his stumbling way back to his Unit, told his daugh-

ter Andra the truth of the often-rumored situation in the Hive, then fled for the life he knew would be forfeit if he were caught again when Light-of-Day returned. The lifts being useless, he had many tens of levels to descend on foot, in his attempt to reach the entrance-level of the Hive, hoping the sealed entrances would be disempowered by the Brain's unprecedented failure. But, since he was already a sick man when he had been "taken for hospitalization" in the first place, his heart gave out three levels short of his goal, and the restoration of Light-of-Day brought robots to his side to complete the job which the power failure had interrupted.

But Andra knew the truth, knew it for a fact. And in her career as an actress, she had fallen in with people of imagination and artistry, people who could envision and believe the terrible truth she had to tell. Together with her newly-gathered band, she determined to do something to wake the Kinsmen up to their danger. This information was received by Fredric Stanton through the agency of Robert Lennick, the fiance of Andra Corby. The President instructed Lennick to continue as an apparent member of the movement, that it might be destroyed—not at its weak inception—but when

it felt most assured of success. That, felt Stanton, would undermine for a long time any subsequent attempts at well-thought-out revolt. Impromptu revolts were easy to control.

Then Andra Corby herself received an injury suitable for the demand of its immediate treatment, and was taken into custody. She escaped from custody by using a corridor through which the robots could not follow. This situation was cleared up by use of a robot squad to widen that corridor, but Andra Corby is still at large.

Results of the fifteen-year-old draft-age Vote showed that the son of Lloyd Bodger, Lloyd Bodger, Junior selected *con* in the Vote. President Stanton was so advised . . .

YOU haven't told me everything," Andra said, when Lloyd had finished. "What, for instance, was the Brain's answer to Stanton's query about a third term? He must have asked it again, when that head-harness thing was repaired . . ."

"There's no record of his having asked it again," Lloyd said. "For some reason, he only asked it the once, and when the Brain overloaded and cut its own power, he didn't get the answer. I can only theorize, there. Perhaps he thought that the sudden surge of electrical power was in-

tended for him, to fry his brains inside his head, and was afraid to ask it again . . . Or perhaps he *got* the answer, but the overload on the Brain erased the information from its memory cells, accidentally."

"And what about your father?" Andra persisted. "For a man the Brain calls indestructible, he looked awfully sick a few minutes ago."

Lloyd nodded thoughtfully. "The Brain didn't tell me anything about that. But a Snapper-Beam should jog even the most stalwart system, normal or not, shouldn't it?"

Andra shrugged, giving it up. "Obviously, both answers lie with both men. If we want them, we'll have to ask your father and President Stanton. But you have not explained away the most vital part of my confusion: When you began to tell me the background of the Hive— What made you so certain I'd *like* what you said?! I can't agree with your prognosis there, Lloyd. The whole thing's chilling!"

"But don't you see what we've learned, Andra?" Lloyd said excitedly. "The Hive is not one city, it's ten. And, while it takes a large portion of the people to run the equipment in any tier, the city— or cities— *can* be run by *people*! The Brain isn't necessary, Andra. And the radiation outside the Hive is gone . . ."

"You mean—" Andra said, catching the fire of his enthusiasm, "A reconstruction of the rockets in place of the Temple-sites. Ten indestructible self-sustaining cities, to fly to various parts of the world, and start civilization over again! But this time with the same ethnic backgrounds, a common language, intercity communications—!"

"It makes me wonder if that mightn't have been Lester Murdock's plan all along," Lloyd said. "He may have foreseen the coming disaster, and wanted mankind to have a better start than working itself up from the caves again."

"But Lloyd—!" Andra said, abruptly worried. "Can it be done? To run the cities, reconstruct the rockets— Who in the Hive has the necessary knowledge?"

Lloyd frowned. "The Brain, of course, but— That would make it necessary, wouldn't it . . . ?"

"If the Brain is necessary, Lloyd," Andra said, staring at him in bewilderment, "then the ten cities *can't* leave it, can they? It doesn't make sense . . ."

LOYD turned and stared at the control panel. "The only thing to do is ask it, Andra." He sat once more in the chair and adjusted the metal band about his skull, then typed carefully: *Is the Brain necessary?*

This time, however, there came no hum of power from the circuits about the control chamber. Instead, the roll of paper on which Lloyd's query had been written jogged up two spaces, and the keys typed the answer neatly, just under the question . . .

For a time, the blurring type-faces spelled out, and stopped.

Lloyd looked at Andra, then removed the uncomfortable head-band, leaned forward and typed again.

Why is the Brain necessary?

The keyboard hummed, and replied, *To bridge the gap.*

How long is the gap? Lloyd typed.

Till the Earth is safe, it replied.

When will the Earth be safe?

The Earth is already safe.

If the Earth is safe, why does the Brain persist?

To serve Man until he has knowledge.

When will Man have knowledge?

When Man can control the Hive.

How can Man learn to control the Hive?

By studying the Plan.

Where is the Plan?

This time, there was a return of the tootling and loud tweetling throughout the vastness of the Brain, as it searched through its every memory circuit before

quieting and typing the solitary word: *Null*.

"The question's not applicable?" Andra said, leaning over Lloyd's shoulder to read the paper. "It *must* be!"

"Quiet! Let me think!" Lloyd snapped, irritably. "The word 'null' can also mean it doesn't have the knowledge . . . Let me try another question—" He typed slowly: *Who knows where the Plan can be found?*

Secondary Speakster.

"We've got to go and ask him where the Plan is!" She clutched at his arm.

"Wait!" Lloyd said, "I have to find out one more thing." Andra stood waiting impatiently while Lloyd typed: *How can the robots be made inoperable?*

They cannot so long as the Brain persists.

"Damn!" Lloyd muttered, and typed: *If the Brain will only persist till Man has knowledge, will the Brain let Man study the Plan that will give him knowledge?*

It must prevent Man from getting knowledge.

Why?

When Man has knowledge, the Brain will die.

Why does the Brain fear death?

The Brain does not fear death.

Then why will the Brain refuse to die?

Primal Speakster has so decreed.

"Stanton! I might have guessed it—!" Lloyd exploded. He typed again, furiously: *How can Primal Speakster tell the Brain to allow Man to have knowledge?*

By countermand.

How is countermand made?

By Voteplate, and by voice.

Whose voice?

The voice of Primal Speakster.

Is this the only way in which countermand can be made?

Primal Speakster has so decreed.

Lloyd stood up and slammed the lid over the keyboard. His eyes, when they met Andra's, were woeful. "We're really in a bind. I have Stanton's Voteplate, but it's no good to me without Stanton himself. The clever, scheming monster!"

"That means we don't dare kill him, even!" Andra realized aloud. "Or the Brain and robots will keep us from ever putting the Plan into effect, even if we find it."

"No," Lloyd said grimly, "it doesn't mean that. You heard the wording, Andra; the Brain recognizes rank before identity. *Primal Speakster* can countermand it. Which means that— if Stanton dies— a new election would bring a new man into office. The Brain will memorize his voice at his first public speech, and then he can countermand Stanton's orders."

"Then it is safe to kill Stanton?" Andra asked.

Lloyd turned and started toward the ladder. "It's more than safe; it's an absolute necessity. Stanton's orders to the Brain are his own death warrant."

GRACE watched the perspiring face of the man on the bed and dug her fingers into her palms, suffering in unison with him as he twitched and contorted the muscles of his face. Their Goon escort had departed, many minutes before, and Bodger had not awakened. Grace had looked in vain for something resembling medicine. None was to be seen in his bathroom, in his bureau drawers, in his closet—she'd checked the contents of the leather case there hopefully, then had dropped the puzzling device she'd found inside it back with disappointment and dismay—nor was there anything but the usual apportionment of food-stuffs in the kitchen. "Wake up, Mr. Bodger . . ." she said, more as a frantic prayer than actual address. "*Please* wake up!"

Bodger just lay there, however, moaning softly in his inexplicable coma, the salt sweat pouring from his face and neck and staining the coverlet beneath him. Grace bent forward and loosened his collar, then went back into the bathroom for a towel to wipe some of the mois-

ture from his skin. On her way out again, towel in hand, she saw a glitter of something in the sink, and went closer. The broken remains of a water tumbler lay there, glinting sharply. Something gummy had dried and clung to the jagged shards there, something that certainly wasn't water. Grace frowned, and looked about her at the tiled walls of the room.

If that was Bodger's medicine on the broken glass—then he had taken it here, in the bathroom, she reasoned. If this were his accustomed spot to take it—The medicine should be near at hand, shouldn't it? She could see no point in his carrying it all the way in here from some other part of the Unit. She looked more closely at the surfaces of the individual tiles, noting with discouragement that the binding compound between the squares was solidly unbroken; no hope for a secret panel there . . . But the mirror—!

Inset in a polished metal rectangle, its edges were out of sight. It might not be as securely in place as it seemed. Grace placed her fingers firmly against its surface and tried to slide it up or down or sideways. It shifted a minute fraction of an inch, and held. But that merely meant a lock of some kind; even a slight shifting showed that it was not inset into the binding compound

as the tiles were. The secret of unlocking the mirror lay with Bodger, however, and— she mused ruefully— if he were awake, she wouldn't need to *know* the secret.

She looked through the open doorway at the tortured form of the man on the bed, and made her decision. Wrapping the towel she held tightly about one fist, she hammered and punched at the surface of the mirror. The fifth blow sent an erratic craze through the glass, and the sixth burst it into a shower of gleaming fragments, leaving a raggedly round hole when she withdrew her hand from the towel, then tugged the towel itself free from where it had snagged on the broken ends. Behind the gaping hole, the side of a glass jar showed, and Grace reached gingerly through the sharp teeth of the opening and withdrew it.

THERE was no label on the bottle, hence no information regarding proper dosage. Grace would have to guess at that.

Very little of the powder remained in the jar. Grace made a decision and removed the cap. She ran the tap for a moment, then let a volume of water equal to the powder's run into the jar. She sloshed it about a bit, saw that it was dissolving into a greyish thick substance, then brought it back to Bodger.

Lifting his head with one hand, she tilted the jar to his lips, and let a small amount of the viscous liquid dribble into his mouth. When she saw he was swallowing it without choking, she gave him a little more, and then again some more, feeding him the solution in slow doses until it was all gone. Then she laid his head back upon the coverlet and put the empty jar on the nightstand, and took up her anxious vigil where she had left off.

After five minutes or so, she was pleased to see a slow return of color into Bodger's sallow cheeks, and his breathing became less labored. She hurried to the bathroom for another towel, and returned and started dabbing the wetness from his forehead, neck and temples. Bodger's eyelids crinkled up tight, suddenly, and then he flicked them wide open.

"Grace—?" he said. "What—"

Memory returned to him, then, and he sat up, staring wildly about him. "Where's Stanton? Where's Lloyd?" he demanded, his voice still showing his siege of weakness. "What happened?"

Grace told him swiftly all she knew, and Bodger finally sank back on the bed with a sigh. "Good," he said. "I'm glad Lloyd's gone to the Brain. It's time it happened. Now, maybe—I can find some peace."



THE PROGRAMMED PEOPLE

109

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"You'll be all right, Mr. Bodger," Grace said. "I gave you your medicine already. I had to break your mirror to get at it, I'm sorry to say."

Bodger smiled wearily, and shook his head. "It doesn't matter anymore. The secrecy, I mean. It was the last dose of the medicine, anyhow. The next time I lose control, I've had it."

"I don't follow you, Mr. Bodger," Grace said, a part of her mind wondering if he were really being coherent. "You were hit with a Snapper Beam. I don't know why you're not dead right this minute."

Bodger cocked an eyebrow at her, then grinned. "You think the *Snapper* did this to me?" he said, and when she quite naturally nodded, he shook his head, almost amused. "You're wrong, Grace, I'll admit I didn't know until Stanton pressed the stud that I was immune to the beam, but I knew it the instant the beam struck me. Nothing happened, Grace. Nothing at all. It tingled against my ribs, almost tickled, but that was its total reaction. As soon as I realized my immunity, of course, I stepped forward and let Stanton have it — You say he really got a good crack?" When Grace assured him the President had fallen like a stone, Bodger's face creased in a contented smile. "I always thought I could beat the tar out

of him; now I know it . . . But as I was saying, Grace— That isn't what felled me. It was my temper. Whenever I get really worked up— which has been seldom, over the years, since I had only a short supply of the gel—that was cadmium-gel in that jar— to bring me out of it— I bring one of these fits on myself."

WHEN Grace still looked uneasily convinced, Bodger laid his hand atop hers on the coverlet, and said, "There's too much detail to it to explain fully; Lloyd, if he's quizzed the Brain as I told him, will fill you in. The fact of the matter is— and you can believe this or not, Grace— my insides are rotten with radiation. The iron in my blood, the insulin, the lymph— everything is highly Roentgenic. And it's perfectly safe unless I get riled, and my adrenals start my system spoiling for a fight. The increased flow of everything, the resultant tension— Well, it lets the deadly parts of my system cover more ground, irradiate more cells at a higher rate than the cells can throw the radiation off, and even by the time I get the gel down— it's pretty nauseating stuff to take— another few inches of my innards are poisoned. If enough of me gets it— I have had it."

"How can you be so calm?"

Bodger smiled at her, quite fondly, and patted her hand. "Because I'm old, Grace. Older than you might suspect. I've lived in the Hive for more years than I care to think about. The Hive is good, but as of not so many years back, it has served its purpose. Listen— If anything goes wrong, and I *do* poison myself with my own rage, there's something you should know?"

"Please, Mr. Bodger, I'm sure you'll be fine if you just—"

"I'm *not* so sure," he interrupted. "And Lloyd will need one point of information that only I can give him. I'll tell it to you, just in case." He held up his hand to stop any further disclaimers from Grace, and said, "Tell him that the Plan is in the hospital, the main hospital. I put it there for safekeeping a long, long time ago. It would become radioactive, of course, but the Plan was useless until all radiation outside the Hive was gone, anyhow. Besides, radiation preserves things; I'm proof of that. Tell him it's in the safe in the administrator's office. The combination's the same as Lloyd's Voteplate number. I saw to that when it was issued."

"Mr. Bodger—!" Grace said, nearly in tears. "I don't understand *any* of this! What Plan!? What radiation outside the Hive!? It doesn't make sense—"

"Lloyd will understand."

"But even if he does," she said, "he doesn't have his Voteplate anymore . . ."

"Doesn't?" Bodger said, frowning, then his face cleared. "Even so, he must know the number by heart, I should think. Anyway, it's in the files in my office . . . But I don't quite understand— Why doesn't he have it? He had it when I passed out, didn't he?"

"Yes, but in order to command the Goons, he took Stanton's, and left his own in Stanton's pocket, probably to avoid having to answer questions about possession of two plates if he was searched or something . . ."

"Stanton's got the plate?!" Bodger said, sitting up. "If he knew its significance—" He shook his head, trying to disabuse himself of a nagging worry. "He can't, of course. But it's awkward, him having it. Lloyd will have to get it back, or he can't key the dial of the safe with it."

He swung his legs off the bed, suddenly, and stood up. Grace grabbed his arm when he swayed a bit, but then he steadied himself and shrugged her off. "I'm all right," he said. "I just don't like Stanton's having that plate."

"Does it matter so much?" Grace asked. "Even if Lloyd forgot the number, or the files were lost and he couldn't get a new

plate made up— Surely the safe can be *broken* into?"

Bodger nodded. "Of course it can. But Stanton, with Lloyd's plate, wouldn't need to take so much time. And he could destroy The Plan in a very few minutes." He went toward the door to the corridor. "I'll feel much better when I've checked on him, Grace."

Grace hesitated, then ran after him. "Lloyd wants me to stay with you. You're still not over your seizure, you know."

"Worrying about Stanton's not going to make me any calmer," Bodger said, stubbornly. "If you insist, come along."

He entered the living room and crossed to the door. Beside the door was a small metal box inset into the wall. Bodger opened the lid of this and touched a button. From a speaker in the box, a voice said, hollow and efficient, "Orders."

"A Goon escort for Secondary Speakster Bodger and Miss Grace Horton, at Unit B, Hundred-Level."

"Destination."

"Unit—" Bodger looked at Grace.

"M-13," she reminded him. "On ninety-three."

"Unit M-13, Ninety-Three Level."

"Orders."

"All orders conveyed."

FRANK, hovering at that moment in puzzlement outside Unit A, wherein he had expected to find Andra and the others beginning a revolt, saw— through the Ultrablack-negating picture on the prop-Goon's cathode screen— the rectangle of light appear when Bodger opened the front door of his own unit across the street while he and Grace awaited their escort. Bodger's and Stanton's Units were not subject to Ultrablack, of course, interiorly. It had been the unforeseen darkness in Stanton's windows that had left Frank in immobile puzzlement on the walk before the Unit.

Seeing Bodger and Grace in the doorway, he turned the wheels of his ponderous vehicle and rolled their way, hoping for information as to Andra's whereabouts. He had just come within a few feet of the twosome, and was about to climb out the back panel when Bodger spoke, hearing the sound of the arriving prop-Goon and thinking it was his requested escort.

"What are you waiting for? We're in a hurry."

Bodger spoke blindly, unable to penetrate the black pall beyond his doorway. Frank hesitated, then decided not to reveal himself as yet. As tonelessly as possible, he spoke to Bodger in the required formula. "Orders."

"You have your orders," Bod-

ger snapped, too keyed up to note any deviation in the accustomed path of the— he assumed— robotic voice. "Take us to Miss Horton's Unit at once."

Frank, believing Stanton was still there, had a chill of apprehension. This man, the Secondary Speakster, might *not* be on the side of revolt; after all, why *should* he be? For all he knew, Andra was dead, and Bodger was now on his way back to release the President. The whole business of socking him might have been a blind, to win her confidence, and worm the names of the movement's members from her.

"Do you hear me?" Bodger said, although Frank's worried pause had been barely a moments duration. "Take us at once. All orders conveyed."

Frank manipulated the arm of the hollow robot up into the doorway, and Bodger, seeing it, took hold. Grace took Bodger's other hand, and then Frank, needing time to think the thing out, turned the bulk of his machine about slowly and began to roll toward the lift. He thought of getting Bodger and the Horton girl out in the toils of Ultrablack and then suddenly deserting them, but hesitated to try it; they might, after all, be what he'd begun to believe they were: sympathetic with the movement. Their reasons for the return to

the girl's Unit might be even Anti-Hive in nature. Frank did not know what to do, so he simply kept moving, got aboard the lift, and thumbed the ninety-three button after Bodger and Grace Horton were safely within the gates.

THE lift dropped smoothly seven levels, then halted, and the gate swung automatically open. And there, his eyes hidden behind a peculiar faceplate, stood Fredric Stanton, hand in hand with Robert Lennick.

"Bodger!" Stanton exploded, seeing him through the filter of his facepiece. Bodger, hearing the voice in the darkness, drew back into a corner of the lift, staring wide-eyed, futilely, for the other man, trying to hide the slim body of Grace Horton behind him, fearing a repeat of Stanton's attack with the Snapper-Beam.

"Where is he!?" she gasped, terrified by that disembodied, menacing voice in the blackness. Stanton, secure in his invisibility, stepped into the lift, ignoring the metal body of the supposed Goon, and slapped Bodger viciously across the face. While Bodger choked at the unexpected blow, and brought his hand up to his injured mouth, Frank realized there was no longer a doubt where the sympathies of the Secondary Speakster lay, and with

one swing of the jointed metal arm of the prop-Goon, he knocked Stanton unconscious with a blow to the base of the skull.

"What happened?" Grace shrielled, clinging to Bodger.

Lennick, deprived of his guide, groped forward in panic, calling, "Mr. Stanton—!" Frank spun the controls, and the metal arm swung up and clasped Lennick viciously about the throat, lifting his kicking body clear off the floor.

"Bodger—!" Frank called out, enjoying the icy terror that flickered in Lennick's congested face at the sound of his voice. "Stanton's out cold at your feet. He has some sort of facepiece he can see with. Put it on!"

Bodger, utterly bewildered as to the sudden turn of events, nevertheless did as directed, and straightened up adjusting the filter over his eyes. When he saw the grisly tableau of Lennick and the prop-Goon, he stepped back, agape with shock. Frank answered his query before Bodger's reeling mind could formulate it coherently. "This is a movie prop. I'm Frank Shawn, a member of Andra's movement, Bodger. And this wriggling worm in my hands is the guy who tried to undo all of us!"

"Frank . . . please . . ." Lennick gurgled, his eyes distending while his hands tore vainly at the heavy metal hands that were

tightening about his windpipe.

"Let him go," Bodger said impatiently. "He can't get far in Ultrablack, anyhow! We've got to get to Lloyd, my son. He's down at the Brain, now. With Stanton in our power, we can free the Hive forever in an hour's time!"

Frank looked at the face of his erstwhile friend, Robert Lennick, and suddenly had no more stomach for murder. He let go, and as Lennick dropped to the floor of the lift and started to double over, gulping air, Frank sent the left arm of the prop-Goon up in an arc that swatted him backwards onto the street outside the gate. Lennick scrambled blindly to his feet, screaming, "Frank! Don't *leave* me, Frank!" He dashed forward, misjudged his angle, and crashed head-on into a building wall. Frank thumbed the lift-button for Sub-Level One, and let the closing gate blot Lennick from his sight. The lift began to drop, swiftly.

Lennick, after lying painfully on the ground until his addled senses returned, got up on hands and knees, groggily shaking his head. Then, in the darkness, he heard rolling wheels, coming nearer. "Help!" he cried. "This way! Help!"

The rumbling veered in his direction at once, and then a Goon's unseen arms were lifting him to

his feet. "The President—" Lennick cried. "He's in danger!"

A moment's hesitance, and the Goon flatly replied, "The President is in no danger. He has been taken to the Brain at his own request, under competent escort."

Lennick, suddenly divining what must be the case, said, "His plate! Someone must have his plate, then, because—"

"You are bleeding," the Goon said dispassionately.

Bob's fingers came up to his face and he winced at the smarting pain their exploration produced at the point where he had struck the building wall. "It's nothing," he said, impatiently. "We've got to—"

"We will take you for hospitalization at once," said the voice of the Goon in the blackness.

"Hospitalization?" Bob said, irritably. "Don't you guys understand? The President—" And then it sank in. "No!" he shrieked. "*You can't! I'm on your side!*"

Other sets of heavy wheels rolled nearer, and inflexible metal fingers closed over his arms. The Goons began to roll ponderously off, with Bob firmly in their grasp. He was still shrieking when the mouth of the incinerator chute enveloped him.

LLOYD and Andra were awaiting the lift at Sub-Level one, guided in the blackness by

the Goon who had led them to the control chamber, when Bodger and the others arrived. Stanton, only semi-conscious, was being held upright in the arms of the prop-Goon, lest a real Goon pick him up for "treatment" because of his bruises, one on the back of his head where Frank had connected, the other glowing a steadily darker purple on his jaw where Bodger's knockout punch had landed earlier. Lloyd, sensing the tenancy of the lift even in the blackness, drew back apprehensively, and then his father's voice was speaking to him in assurance.

"Whatever orders you've given your guide, son, take them back. We've got you-know-who, and we're taking him to the Brain with us." Andra's fingers closed joyously over Lloyd's own at the words, but he pulled his fingers free and slipped Stanton's Voteplate into his guide's chest-slot.

"Last order countermanded," he said to the Goon. "We have no further need of you. All orders conveyed." The Goon removed the plate, handed it to him, and wheeled off into the darkness. "Dad!" he spoke, then. "I found out so much, from the Brain! The Plan— for reactivating the ten cities— The Brain said you knew where it was."

"Grace will tell you, son," said Bodger. "Meantime—" he pressed Lloyd's own Voteplate

into his hand "—take this, you'll need it. And give me Stanton's. I'm taking him down to the Brain. I may have to break his arm for him, but he's going to call off the Goons before I'm through."

"Mr. Bodger—" Frank said, taking out Stanton's preempted Snapper and holding it forward into the darkness. "This may come in handy for persuasion. There's no need your overtaking yourself."

Bodger reached out and took it from him. "Thank you, Shawn. Rest assured I'll be only too glad to use it on him if he balks." Bodger motioned to Frank, still in the prop-Goon. "See if you can shake him awake, or something. I don't know how he can get down the ladder except on foot, much as I'd like to drop him into the chamber, if I thought it wouldn't break his rotten neck."

Frank did so, gladly, while Grace, fumbling for and finding Lloyd in the darkness, clung to him in joy and relief. He found himself liking it, and slipped his arms around her to enjoy it the better.

"Frank—" Andra said, slowly, hurt. "We found out, from the Brain, that Bob— Bob's in Stanton's pay."

"We found out, too, Andy," Frank said from inside the pseudorobot. "The hard way. We left him in Ultrablack on ninety-

three. The louse had freed Stanton, and—"

"He's coming to," Bodger said.

IN the agitated shaking of the metal hands that supported him by the upper arms, Stanton blinked wildly at Ultrablack, and choked out, "Let me go! I demand that you release me!"

"You're no longer in a position to demand anything," Bodger said softly. "I have your skinny carcass covered with a Snapper. You may as well relax."

"Bodger . . . What are you going to do?" Stanton said, no longer fighting the grip of the prop-Goon's hands.

"Take you to the Brain. Make you countermand all your orders regarding the Goons."

"And if I don't?" Stanton said, warily. "What will you do if I refuse?"

"Kill you," Bodger said, and his tone rang true. "I don't want to do it that way, of course— not for reasons of pity; heaven knows you need killing, Fred—but because it's faster this way. With you dead, we'd simply elect a new President, and then *he* could countermand your orders. That could take days, though, days of the Ultrablack you had Madge Benedict instigate in this emergency. It would be too tedious convincing the Kinsmen to Vote in the dark on a proposition they couldn't see."

"I—" Stanton said blankly, "I thought you'd force Madge to turn on Light-of-Day."

"We would, but Lloyd mistakenly ordered her held incommunicado," Bodger said tiredly. "He didn't know that was another of your pet phrases synonymous with death."

"Good Lord!" Lloyd moaned in the darkness. "I didn't *dream*—"

"Madge brought it on herself, working hand in glove with Stanton, son," Bodger said. "You did not know. The point is, only Stanton or his personal Secretary could have called off the emergency. So now we have to get tough with him."

"Bodger . . ." Stanton straightened up, his face grim in defeat. "I have to know: If I *do* as you ask, countermand the Goons, call off the Ultrablack— What will happen to me, afterwards?"

"I can't say, Fred," Bodger replied flatly. "We'll have it put to a general Vote."

"I see," said the President, knowing full well what the result of such a Vote would be, with the Hive enraged against his exposed treachery. "Is it your best offer?"

"My only," said Bodger. "Let's go, Fred."

He prodded Stanton's back with the Snapper, and the President began to move forward, holding his head high, toward the staircase leading to the con-

trol-chamber entrance. Frank opened the panel at the rear of the prop-Goon, and called for Andra to join him inside it, then he took Lloyd and Grace by the arms, via the controls, and guided them through the black blindness after Bodger and his prisoner.

AT the head of the staircase— really no more than a tier-cut segment of the lead-concrete Sub-Level Two, over which the correspondingly undercut left wall of the twenty-five-foot-thick level could slide— Frank had to come to a halt, his prop-Goon not being equipped with extendable cogs to fit the treads and risers, as the real Goons' wheels were. "I'm going down there with him," Lloyd said, starting down into blackness.

"No," his father's voice came from the level below. "I'll handle this myself, Lloyd. I can see my way and you can't."

Lloyd stood undecided on the brink of the staircase, then Grace found his arm in the dark and drew him back. "I want to talk to you about your father, Lloyd," she said, when he was again at her side. "He said some strange things, up in the Unit . . ."

Descending the ladder below his prisoner, the Snapper aimed upward always at the base of Stanton's spine, Bodger reached the cable-net flooring, and ges-

tured the President to the chair before the control panel. "Here," he said, returning the other's Voteplate. "You'll need this. But I don't have to tell you the penalty for one attempt at trickery on your part."

Stanton took the card silently, and slid it into a slot on the control panel. A metal square slid back, exposing a hand microphone. He took it in his hand, and spoke into it.

"Primal Speakster in control," he said.

All about the two men, the lights of the Brain flickered then a speaker in the cavity which had held the microphone said, in the cold, flat tones of the Brain, "Orders."

Stanton glanced up at Bodger, and smiled. And suddenly Bodger was afraid. There was no hint of fear in the other man's eyes, now, only confidence and terrible menace.

"There is a false robot, two men and two women with it, on Sub-Level One," said Stanton, while Bodger goggled in surprise. "Destroy them!"

"Orders," said the Brain.

"Stanton!" Bodger raged, snapping out of his stunned paralysis. He depressed the stud of the Snapper clear into the hilt of the weapon, trying to prevent the activating words from being spoken by the President. There was a fractional hum of power,

and then a searing fork of hot blue light leaped from a conic protrusion on the Brain's inner surface and turned the weapon to molten metal in his fingers. Bodger fell to the flooring, crying out in pain, his raw, blistered hand nearly driving him unconscious.

"You should have known," Stanton addressed the mewling figure on the ground near his chair, "that a sonic beam cannot be fired inside the Brain; it would shatter some of the delicate balances necessary for its functioning. The Brain has to safeguard itself."

"Stanton—!" Bodger groaned, gritting his teeth against the agony of his seared hand. "Don't! . . . Please . . ."

"Danger," said the dispassionate voice of the Brain.

STANTON spun to face the concavity of the speaker. "What—?" he blurted, baffled. And then he heard the dim rumble, high above, as the entire lead-concrete Sub-Level Two slid relentlessly closed. Stanton jumped from the chair and looked up from the base of the ladder, to see if his ears had told him the truth. All that was visible at the head of the hundred-foot ladder was the bottom of the now-closed metal lid, over which the entire next level had moved. He turned, white-faced, to Bodger.

"What's happening?"

"*Danger*," repeated the Brain. Stanton rushed to the side of the fallen man. "Bodger!" he shrieked, lifting him by the shoulders and shaking him. "What's happening!?"

"I guess—" Bodger said, smiling tiredly despite the cruel burns, "—I must've got mad, Fred. My innards, or don't you know about them?"

"I know all about your radiating innards!" Stanton exploded. "But *they* couldn't trigger the Brain's protective level! It's impossible! You've been here before—"

"I was never . . . this aroused . . . before, Fred," Bodger said weakly. "And now, for the first time, I . . . know the answer to something I never knew before." He took a breath, gathered together all his strength, and lifted his face near the other man's, still smiling. "You asked the Brain about a third term, once—Don't argue, Fred, it's on record—and yet there is no memory in its circuits of a reply. Tell me, Fred . . . What *was* its reply?" When Stanton did not respond, Bodger said, "I think I can tell you. Chaos. Noise. A riot of sound and fury that knocked you clear off your chair and broke the circuit before it destroyed you. Because the Brain knew, of course. It's smart, Fred. It can predict with better accuracy than a human mind. It foresaw, after

correlating all the facts at its disposal, what would be the result of your attempt at being elected a third time. And it tried to . . . tell you . . ." Bodger faltered, went grey, and lay back upon the interwoven cables with his eyes closed. His lips were still working, though, and he finished, ". . . the result . . . except that the . . . Brain doesn't speak . . . in words . . . just concepts . . . and its concept encompassed . . . its own . . ."

His head rolled to one side, limply.

"*Danger*," croaked the voice of the Brain.

"Its *what*? Its own *what*?!" Stanton yelled, grabbing Bodger's head by the hair and banging it violently upon the flooring. Bodger, his eyes rolling, coughed painfully, then sighed, as one who names a long-awaited friend, ". . . death."

"*Danger*!" said the Brain. A wild tootling began in its depths as its metal mind tried to spare it its terrible fate.

"What danger?" Stanton roared into the microphone, leaping to the chair before the control panel. "Tell me! I'll find a way out!"

"*Danger!*" said the Brain. "*Danger! Danger!*"

There was a wild bluish light playing on the face of the panel, now, and Stanton knew, suddenly, that it was not of the Brain

itself. He turned, some hideous psychic insight telling him what he could not as yet realize by his senses, and looked at the body of Lloyd Bodger on the floor.

Veins and arteries shone like a network of neon lights through the flesh, a pulsing glow that rose in its intensity by the second. The internal organs appeared through Bodger's smoldering clothing as on the screen of a fluoroscope, each alight with

self-engendered hellfire. Bodger's eyes were glowing like hot tungsten through his transparent lids, his teeth were bared in a smile brighter than sunrise. His every bone, bit of cartilage, nerve ganglion and muscle fibre sparked like coals beneath a blacksmith's bellows, and the hairs of his head were a Medusa-wig of burning, writhing wire.

And then he reached his critical mass.

THE END

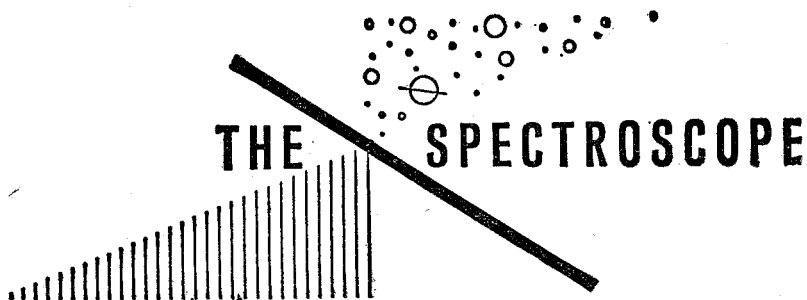
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Our series of SF Profiles continues in the next issue with the life story of John Campbell, writer. (As a competitor, we shall eschew comments on John Campbell, editor.) As one of the giants of the field, Campbell's comments on sf and its future direction must be of interest and importance to all readers.

August AMAZING will also have several short stories, plus the regular departments. Look for it on your newsstand, July 11.



THE SPECTROSCOPE

By S. E. COTTS

A Clockwork Orange. By Anthony Burgess. 184 pp. W. W. Norton & Co., Inc. \$3.95.

This novel by a young English author provides a strange, new and extremely disturbing reading experience. There are two reasons for this: the thought-provoking attitudes and philosophies of Alex, the hoodlum hero of the story and the way Mr. Burgess weakens and confuses his "disturbing" material. I am not sure that an author can be a successful and convincing novelist if, after spending the bulk of his book trying to indoctrinate us with his unorthodox and "disturbing" point of view, he suddenly changes directions in the end and leaves the reader's emotions hanging. He moves us through a story where at first we have absolutely no sympathy with his juvenile delinquent (to put it mildly), then to where we feel some faint sparks of pity

and compassion for him (a tour de force in itself, given the hero's obnoxiousness), and then at the end Burgess removes the set of conditions which were responsible for the pity in the first place. What does he prove by this final switch? What does he want to say? Does he hope that our pity will stick in spite of the changed circumstances, is he trying to show that the old saw about there being good in the worst of us is simply an old saw, or is he really contributing to the current, vast Literature of the Absurd?

The book is Alex's story, told in Alex's special jargon. This latter takes a little getting used to, but it is a mark of the thought put into the book, that the new and strange words almost always appear in a context where they can be immediately understood, and they recur again and again with an almost hypnotic insist-

ence. Indeed it comes as a shock when Alex lapses into ordinary English for the benefit of some of the story's squares. Alex is a real hoodlum at the tender age when he should be (in our day), at most, a juvenile offender. The nauseous catalogue of how he spends his evenings, when the older people make sure they are off the streets, makes today's gang activities seem like the corner social club. During the daytime he ostensibly goes to school, though he most often pretends to be sick in order to sleep. His parents are as unaware of this state of affairs as the reader is unaware of what has happened historically and socially to produce an Alex who is, it seems to be suggested, not an isolated phenomenon, but more or less the prototype of all the youth. The thing which separates Alex from his fellows, so the author would have us believe, is his love for classical music—not for its inherent value alone, but also for its ability to conjure up in his imagination more blood and sex than even his lawless nature can find in real life.

Alex lands in prison, as he was bound to sooner or later. Any reader in his right mind would say he deserves everything that prison and the police do to him. But Alex has a distinctive philosophy: that it is unfair for the schools, police, etc., to try to de-

termine the cause of Badness because they don't try to go into what is the cause of Goodness. He goes on to say that the Bad is part of the self, and the government, etc., cannot allow the Bad because they cannot allow the self. All of which is as fancy a rationalization for destroying the Good as one is likely to meet anywhere, but very typical of dear Alex. He says he wouldn't want to interfere with the pleasures of the good folk, except of course that his very existence threatens not only their pleasures but their lives.

The story pivots around the rehabilitation treatment that Alex voluntarily undergoes in prison in order to be released. He is put into the hands of a group of scientists who take away his ability to be bad, not through a lobotomy-like operation, but through conditioning in connection with certain drugs so that the very thought of violence (even that involved in self-defense) makes him feel physically ill. But in order to heighten this training further it is accompanied by music, so that the sound of music itself becomes enough to make him ill. This drastic occurrence is not intentional on the part of the scientists; they were unaware that music meant anything special to Alex. At this point, where Alex, helpless to defend himself, is turned out into the world, de-

prived of the solace of music, the only thing he really loved, it is possible to feel him as a person, not simply a menace. Then Burgess slams the door on all this by a series of irrational and absurd incidents. Alex meets up with his old gang who have now become members of the Police Force (though their character and morals are the same as ever), Alex meets one of his old victims, Alex becomes first a symbol and then almost a martyr for a group wanting to overthrow the present government. In his misery he attempts to commit suicide. In nursing him back to health, the doctors inadvertently reverse his previous conditioning, and the last scene shows Alex lying on his hospital bed luxuriating in Beethoven and the marvelous pictures of violence it conjures up.

This is an original and important work by an extremely talented writer. But I don't care for the Theatre or Literature of the Absurd. It is basically nihilistic, ripping down everything without any replacement. (Even if one can agree that this type of thing is a mirror of the world today, does this fact make it Art?) It is possible that Mr. Burgess doesn't mean his book to be taken for this type of work. I don't think so, however, because if he had wanted, he could have stopped with Alex in his helpless,

non-violent stage. It would already have been complete as a narrative and would have presented many searching questions—can good be superimposed from outside? Is it morally justifiable to take away the freedom to be bad? Is forcible non-violence really the same as goodness? Can you change the man without changing his milieu? And many, many more.

Yet the author doesn't choose to stop, but goes on to the lengths mentioned above. In doing so, he seems to be thumbing his nose at the reader for taking him seriously. This may be acceptable author tactics in a comedy, but *A Clockwork Orange*, whatever its intentions, can never fall into that category.

The Zilov Bombs. By D. G. Barron. 173 pp. W. W. Norton & Co., Inc. \$3.95.

This is a first novel, also by an English author. In its understated and quiet tone it is in direct contrast to Anthony Burgess' striking book. Though not so shocking in narrative, it is in many ways more effective because it saves its punches for the points the author really wants to stress, instead of bludgeoning the reader into insensitivity by constant reiterations of unpleasantness. Its only point of similarity with Burgess' novel is that both are concerned with the trou-

bles confronting one major character. In each, the hero's course is determined by his own particular emotional and personal makeup, his actions take place within an environment whose cause is never directly stated. What we learn about the sociological, economic and political factors of the two periods comes through indirectly in bits and pieces.

What is eventually revealed in *The Zilov Bombs* is that Britain (like the rest of Europe) is now occupied by the Russians, and rather as a result of appeasement and a strong "Ban the Bomb" pacifistic feeling than from an earth-shaking catastrophe. The book's hero, Guy Elliot, is not too unhappy or uncomfortable under the new regime. His job as a farm inspector makes him more or less his own boss and lets him roam his beloved English countryside. Then a chance glimpse of an act of sabotage by a brother of an acquaintance starts to pull him unwillingly but relentlessly into action for the Underground, an organization whose existence he hadn't even suspected.

His involvement alienates his wife, who has grown accustomed to the relative safety of the new regime. His hesitation about

whether to join is responsible for the betrayal and death of a friend. His decision to pull out, forces the Underground group to take him prisoner in a sense, because he knows too much. Up until the last page he is the victim of self-imposed, agonized mental conflict. And in the end, his final capitulation to the wishes of the dying Underground leader is quite moving.

The waverings of Elliot's mind and conscience may annoy some readers. They will say he is wishy-washy. Perhaps so, but because of this he remains intensely human and therefore very realistic.

I have elected to spend my whole column on these two books because there is no question that, regardless of good or bad features, they are important and interesting works. In a year noted for the mediocre infertility of most of American science fiction, these English imports glow reassuringly. And while it is undoubtedly true that only the best foreign books ever land in the hands of American publishers, I would be hard pressed to name any two homegrown sf books of the past months that make more stimulating reading.

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... OR SO YOU SAY

(Continued from page 4)

Dear Miss Goldsmith:

The last couple of issues, you haven't had a Classic Reprint. Is this (I hope) just because of a few long pieces in the rush pile or have you decided to discontinue the thing? I fervently hope that the former is true.

I have been reading science fiction on and off since the time when I grabbed Jules Verne by mistake from the Young Adults section. Since I was ten and for the past six years I have become an addict, and especially fascinated by some of the "old" masters. Except for an occasional reprint in paperback or your 35th anniversary issue (a sacred treasure on my shelf) I can't get enough of it.

Of course if I wait long enough, some of the old stuff will get reprinted, but I don't want to wait. So please do some of your younger story hounds a favor and show them the styles of the "old" masters. I, for one, would appreciate it greatly.

Kathleen Stipek
Navy 115 Box 37
c/o Fleet Postoffice
New York, New York

● *Just a matter of space—most of the Classics are long. But there will be more of the old masters coming up.*

... OR SO YOU SAY

Dear Editor:

I'd like to talk a minute about your book review on Bob Heinlein's *Podkayne Of Mars*, which I personally didn't like. Mr. Cotts does not make too many remarks about the theme of the story itself, he just elaborates on what happens. This cannot compare with most of his other works, such as *Star Trooper* or *Stranger In A Strange Land*. It would seem that he likes the story. But to me the story did nothing. What purpose did it accomplish? What point did it bring out? None. It was just plain old story, and written in a way I just didn't like. I hope you publish this letter, I'd like to hear what the other fans have to say about it.

Paul Gilster
42 Godwin Lane
St. Louis 24, Mo.

● *Podkayne was, after all, a "Juvenile"—a teen-age story for teenagers. So criticism should not be unduly harsh.*

Dear Editor:

I'm not too familiar with J.F. Bone, and I think I recall reading a short of his in AMAZING that I disliked quite a while ago ... but "For Service Rendered" was positively fabulous. I read this in English class, my teacher caught me with the AMAZING, and took it home. Next day she had everyone read it (the Bone

story). Now she confesses she's a fan and has loved science fiction all her life. What a miracle!

Dave Keil

38 Slocum Crescent

Forest Hills 75, New York

● *The moral is: never underestimate the potentialities of your English teacher.*

Dear Mr. Lobsenz:

Quite by chance, I came across your February issue (there was a reproduction of its cover in the London Observer, illustrating an article by Kingsley Amis). I was naturally very interested in Sam's Profile which, I think, is very fair and perceptive.

Of course there are a few minor corrections: for example, I was not born on a farm, but in a boarding-house (watch that pronunciation), where my grandmother took in lodgers. It was a very high-class establishment; we had titled ladies and one Russian princess as regular clients. The house still stands, but the local Council has as yet erected no brass plaque.

A couple of name corrections: the B.I.S. was founded by P. E. Cleator. My flat-mate was Maurice K. Hanson.

I'd completely forgotten the poem Sam quotes, but I suspect that the fact that it scans and rhymes was largely due to Eric Frank Russell.

Sam is, of course, entitled to his view that *Inheritance* did not merit publication—but I would like to point out that, as far as I know, this is the *only* story for which Campbell ever broke his ban on reprints!

I didn't use pseudonyms in the second and third issues of FANTASY because I considered the stories inferior. At the time it appeared that I might have more than one story per issue and Walter Gillings asked me to concoct an alias.

Prelude to Space may be "hopelessly outdated"—but so is all of Verne. That the novel still has viability is proved by the recent paperback re-issue, under a title that I deplore, and plans for a new hardback edition.

The space battle in *Earthlight*, which Sam admires, was a deliberate and conscious attempt to see if I could outdo Doc Smith. I wrote the battle sequence just for fun in the late thirties, without any thought of using it. Later, with revisions, I incorporated it in *Earthlight*. It is an interesting fact that progress (?) of technology since the first conception made it necessary for me to update it twice before publication.

I certainly didn't write *Childhood's End* in two weeks! The Novella from which it originated was written in July 1946 and submitted to Campbell, rejected,

re-written in '47, rejected again, and finally sold to SUPER SCIENCE STORIES in 1949 after extensive revisions by James Blish. *Childhood's End* was begun in February 1952, when I revised *Guardian Angel* to make it the first part of the novel. There was then a gap of six months and I began work again in August, finishing the first draft in December. It was, however, revised during a hectic nine days in April 1953 in the Hotel Roosevelt. This is what Sam probably had in mind. I can remember absolutely nothing of this and have only my written record to guide me. I have always found that time spent in writing becomes deleted from my memory, and wonder if other writers experience the same phenomenon.

Sam is quite right in stressing the influence of Stuart and Stapledon on my work. However, the "classics" — Haggard, Verne, Doyle, Wells, and Burroughs also had a major influence. (I don't hesitate to put E.R.B. in this company.)

Sam suggests that I made a decision as to what type of science-fiction I wanted to write, and chose to go against the trend. I'm afraid he is attributing me a greater consciousness of my motives than I, in fact, possess. I certainly never made any decision and was not aware until I

read Sam's article that I was going against any trend!

One final bleat: I wish Sam didn't use the past tense *quite* so often. On reading his Profile, I feel that I'm already dead, instead of half-dead.

Arthur C. Clarke

● *Thanks to Mr. Clarke for the comments, corrections and obiter dicta. Contrary to Mr. C's protestations, nothing is quite so intensely alive as an author reading a profile of himself.*

Dear Editor:

The article "A Soviet View of American SF" by Alexander Kazantsev rather amused me. When Americans read Soviet literature (not just their science fiction) we look for, and of course find, (because we *are* looking for it) "proof" that the people of Russia are bitterly suppressed and are rising up in rebellion. We show in our articles that their Literature (the stories we chose to represent their literature that is) clearly shows the superiority of system.

Well, it seems the Russians do the same thing. In this case, to my beloved sf. It looks as if the Law of Relativity applies to Reason as well as physics.

Hank Luttrell

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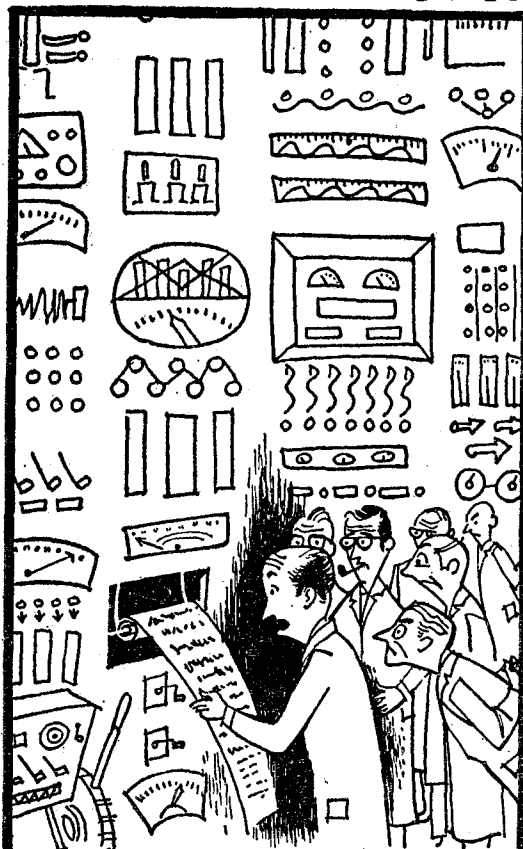
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EDITORIAL (from page 5)

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his other conclusions must be objectively re-examined—unless, that is, one simply feels, as I do, that while one bad apple spoils the rest, the accidental presence of one or two good apples does not redeem a spoiled barrelful.

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